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THE SALON OF MADAME NECKER

THE SALON

OF

MADAME NECKER

BY

VICOMTE D'HAUSSONVILLE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

HENRY M. TROLLOPE

IN TWO VOLUMES

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

MADAME NECKER'S JOURNAL 1

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRLHOOD AND EARLY YEARS OF GERMAINE NECKER . . . 19

CHAPTER III.

THE MARRIAGE 45

CHAPTER IV.

M. NECKER'S FIRST TERM OF OFFICE LIFE 69

CHAPTER V.

PAGE
THE GENERAL CONTROL OFFICE 97

CHAPTER VI.

THE SALON IN THE RUE BERGÈRE 146

CHAPTER VII.

M. NECKER A SECOND TIME IN OFFICE 177

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HISTORY OF COPPET 198

CHAPTER IX.

COPPET DURING THE REVOLUTION 211

CHAPTER X.

MADAME NECKER'S LAST YEARS 255

THE SALON OF MADAME NECKER

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MADAME NECKER.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME NECKER'S JOURNAL.

"A SOUL which God, in creating it, has brought nearer to the infinite soon feels the narrow bounds within which it is enveloped; it has unknown sorrows as to the cause of which it has long been mistaken; it readily believes that a certain concourse of circumstances has troubled its life, whereas its trouble has come from above." These words, spoken by a Christian orator, have often come before me as, in the course of this task, I have gradually learnt to know Mme. Necker more and more intimately. If an existence was ever full to overflowing with the gifts of a benevolent Providence it was

assuredly that of this woman, whose heart was so widely divided between affections so deep and so very various. She enjoyed all the pleasures that wealth, a brilliant position, and the attachment of warm-hearted friends can add to the life of a woman who adores her husband and who is also mother of an illustrious daughter. But in examining the five volumes published after her death, made up of extracts from her manuscripts, I was astonished to find, among many delicate and sometimes subtle thoughts, certain accents which seemed to come from a mind familiar with many kinds of sorrow. She says somewhere: "The pleasures that are dearest to our hearts often bring with them a feeling of melancholy; we must often turn away from our own thoughts; we wish to find a refuge in our own hearts against our own selves, and in spite of our resistance we think we feel the paw of the tiger to be upon us." And again elsewhere: "The regret of past times always turns my thoughts towards that being for whom no time is past; I think I see him surrounded in the time of all people, and I try to find by his side moments and individuals which are no longer alive to us; then my soul becomes calmed, my wandering and unhappy thoughts find a harbour of refuge."

But my astonishment was very much greater as I perused the notes and the unfinished daily journals that

Mme. Necker had written. When, according to her own forcible expression, the tiger's paw came upon her in the midst of her happiness, when her wandering and unhappy thought was too strong within her, she would take up a pen, and upon the first piece of paper that came to her hand give expression to all her sadness, sometimes eloquently and with the bitter hardness of despair. She was one of those souls whom God, according to Lacordaire, has brought near to the infinite, and who suffer from the boundaries in which they are confined. She had received very much from life, and she demanded more. Carried along by the ardour of her thoughts, she was ever knocking and bruising herself against that immovable barrier which chains man and all the greatness of his desires within such a narrow circle.

The somewhat stiff reserve in which Mme. Necker voluntarily held herself, hid from her own eye the melancholy and impassioned side of her nature. Warned by experience that the natural warmth of her heart might lead her into trouble, tormented by a scrupulous conscience ever urging some point of duty, as she advanced in life the idea became more and more fixed in her mind not to leave anything to chance nor to the impulse of the moment, but to test her own smallest actions as though they were serious matters requiring

consideration. At one time, under the title *Maxims necessary for my happiness*, she drew out for her own guidance a certain number of rules of conduct, founded upon wisdom and upon virtue, and to which she invariably gave the formula: *Always to have before my mind . . . . . ,* forgetting that she might very well accomplish her good object without its being continually in her thoughts. At another time in a collection of small pieces which she entitled: *Journal of my failings and my faults, with the best means not to do the same things again,* she registered day after day with a touching humility her hasty moments, or things left undone in her daily duty for which she thought she ought to reproach herself. And again, to assure herself that she might not spend her time in such a way as afterwards to give her a feeling of sorrow, she noted down every evening how she had spent each hour of the day from when she got up to when she went to bed. And also to fortify her conscience she endeavoured to plan out her days according to a certain system which she hoped to be able always to follow. She then began a journal, on the first page of which she wrote, *Journal of the expenditure of my time,* and she continues:—

God has given me twenty-four hours to spend every day; this is the journal which must be my guide, for I have only one

object—to please the most perfect of all men and to fulfil the task which he has entrusted to me. God shall be the moving power and the end of all my actions, the predominating thought to which they must all tend; but he does not exact from me too long contemplations. I am a faithful servant, unceasingly occupied in my master's interests, but he cannot remain too long in converse with me, knowing full well that his perfections have raised him too far above me to allow him to be importuned with my talk. I will therefore devote ten minutes in the evening to implore his protection, and twenty minutes in the morning to show him how I have employed my time the preceding day, to ask for his help, and to renew my resolutions, so that my ideas may be all the day present before me. Let me now see how I ought to employ my time to please God.

Still going on with the examination of her life, she found that she had seven claims upon her: her husband, her child, her friends, the poor, the household duties, society, her dress;—and after having determined upon the number of hours she ought to give every day to each one of these claims, she began by keeping a sort of day-book divided into seven parts, in which she proposed to herself to set down this new kind of book-keeping and so assure herself by a general casting up of the accounts at the end of each month, that each one of the claims had apportioned to it the time and place which she had at first intended. Is it necessary to add that the day-book was soon put aside, and that the exigencies of her daily life, much stronger than all these ingenuous schemes, soon shattered into atoms

their artificial framework? In describing the character of Mme. Necker I need not more insist upon this; and I have elsewhere shown how much of her time was taken up by society and by her friends. But of her self-imposed duties there are two that I should like to study, her husband and her child. We may thus be enabled to see the reasons for Mme. Necker's melancholy, and may understand how the excessive exigencies of her nature did not destroy, but did temporarily injure for her, the two greatest sources of happiness given to a woman: to enjoy in her married life all the transports of love, and to see the first rays of triumph play upon the forehead of her child.

There was no mystery in the idolatrous attachment which Mme. Necker showed to her husband. At a time when the conjugal tie was not held in very high honour, she was prodigal of the signs of her great affection, and the demonstrations of her enthusiasm, which may now seem to us to be perhaps excessive, never provoked a smile from people during her lifetime, so fully did they accord with the opinion usually received. But these demonstrations, which Mme. Necker liked to give in too visible a form (as also to the portrait of her husband which was handed about from one person to another during her lifetime and which was published after her death), are, it appears to me, less touching than those

other demonstrations first collected, now a century since, by M. Necker in an envelope upon which he had written the one word *Wife*. However painful all these recollections may have been to M. Necker, we may understand that after his wife's death he should find a sorrowful pleasure in reading over again a letter that Suzanne Curchod had written to him a few days before their marriage. In this letter we may see how the ardent and imaginative girl abandoned herself to her great ecstasy of delight in feeling that she was then for the first time in her life loved as in truth she deserved :—

Oh ! my Jacques, my dear Jacques, never ask me to express my feelings ; let me enjoy my happiness without thinking about it. When I begin to contemplate upon it I fear that it will escape from me, and I cannot think of the joyful moments of my life without foreseeing that life itself must one day end. The agitation of my heart and the sorrowful images that come before me are enough to prevent me from satisfying you. Reflect at least upon the tie that you are about to contract. I fear to make you the most ungrateful of men. Ah ! if you are not the most soft-hearted, refrain ; turn away your eyes and tear this letter, for it would render you too guilty. Yes, my friend, you are the chain that binds me to the world. The instant that you cease to love me I shall become a stranger to all nature. I shall then have seen fall down the barrier that now stands between life and myself—a barrier that is more insuperable even than death. Think now in what my happiness consists. Is it not the delight that I have your love which brightens everything for me ? I see in the pleasures of friendship a poor likeness of our union, in the brilliancy of fortune all the labour that you have bestowed

to acquire, in the seductions of self-love, the assurance that I shall please you, in the occupations of the mind the hope to fascinate your sight,—and I am resolved to employ my time so as to make up for any loss that this may cause to me. When I am falling asleep I say to myself, he loves me; and in this sweet feeling of security sleep comes and takes possession of all my senses. If I awake, my first impulse is towards heaven, but my soul becomes soon confounded with yours, and the thought of this union inspires me with fresh ardour. My dear friend, do not brood upon a sentiment that my heart renders inexhaustible. If at the moment of my death your love for me will then have reached its highest point, that day will have been the grandest day in all my life.

As M. and Mme. Necker were rarely absent one from the other their correspondence is but small; a few letters were exchanged between them, affectionate and lively when written by the husband, impassioned and often melancholy when written by the wife. From these letters I will select one in which we shall see Mme. Necker a prey to the first uneasiness of a feeling which for some years was the cause of a great drawback to her happiness. This letter dates from the time when her husband had begun to be mixed up with the business of the India Company, that is to say, a few years after their marriage:—

It seems to me, my dear friend, that I have never loved you so much as now. The thought that binds me to you runs through my whole heart and soul. I do not feel my own existence except for your sake. I never think of myself except as in the second place; I must always begin by you before I can come to

myself. If I was not a little afraid of the inconstancy of your character, if I did not think that a life of incessant movement was necessary for you, and that sentiment without uneasiness could not subsist in your heart, you may believe that I should at once make for you any sacrifice that was possible. I tell you now in the most loving way, that if an angel assured me that you would show to me in the middle of a desert the same fond affection that you give to me here in Paris, I would go with you there to-morrow without a sigh, and perhaps even with pleasure. I should rejoice in being able to enjoy nothing but what you gave me, and from sentiments very different from yours I take poor pleasure in those delights which you do not procure for me. Such is the bottom of my heart, and I know myself pretty well. This nature is ineradicable in me; it will never leave me until death. While I am upon earth my motto is *Either thee or nothing.*

After that, can you reproach me that I am fond of books? My dear friend, it is only an old habit that I think admirable to retain, because of the restlessness of my soul and because of the loneliness I feel in your absence. But your reproach is too frequent, and though this uneasiness may make you more soft-hearted, I would sooner—and it is with difficulty that I can bring myself to say so—I would sooner be less loved and that you should be happy. I will therefore make a bargain with you: the moment that you have for ever given up all connection with the India Company I will promise you, if you wish it, to lay aside Fénelon, and never to take up a pen upon any other subject; and I hope with all my heart that the sacrifice I ask of you will not be greater on your side than that which I on my side shall make for you. For, my dear friend, the happiness that I enjoy with you is sometimes slightly clouded by my fears. Your character is not so unchangeable as mine. Often you do not know your own self. The world and its business are necessary for you. With me you find all your pleasures, but not all your wants. Perhaps one day . . . My pen refuses to write it. Ah! if I was ever less dear to you, I should never outlive for a

moment the loss of your affection. For my part, I know it full well, I have only one soul, and that is yours. I must either love you or die.

When Mme. Necker proposed to her husband to abandon her literary schemes and the eulogium upon Fénelon which she was then writing, upon the condition that he, on his side, would give up the direction of the India Company, the bargain offered was not altogether a fair one. Perhaps she had not sufficiently considered that women alone are capable of so totally absorbing themselves in one sentiment, and that there are few men (whether it be a sign of inferiority or of greater strength in their nature) whom one can ask to sacrifice to love the ambitions of their life. And the unreasonableness of these demands gave Mme. Necker much pain and jealous feeling, which, had she given the matter a little thought, she might have avoided. The jealousy she felt was not that senseless coarse-minded envy that may arise for little or no cause against any given person, but a more noble jealousy that wishes to possess undividedly all the thoughts and all the moments of the person loved. If already she found a rival in the India Company, it was much worse when, after Louis XVI. came to the throne, plans for reform were urged from every quarter, and public opinion insisted upon M. Necker having his place in the govern-

ment; and when he found himself face to face with the Herculean task of introducing his plans for financial and administrative reforms, Mme. Necker misconstrued the habitual pre-occupation of her husband's mind, his long silence, his unevenness of temper; and in his altered demeanour, brought about by the mental worry, in a nature whose fine sensibility was hardly compatible with the rough work of public life, she then thought she perceived symptoms of a coming coldness in his affection for her. And this was also just at the time when with her the first signs of age were beginning to show themselves; the effects of constant ill-health were also beginning to tell upon her, and she was gradually losing that expression of countenance and that brilliant complexion which, as a girl, had been among her greatest charms. The idea that she would no longer have full possession of her husband's heart, and that she had perhaps ceased to give him pleasure, threw her into a state of utter hopelessness. We should look in vain through all her letters to Thomas or even to Moultou to find any expression of these thoughts, for in her pride this woman would not have allowed any indiscreet glance to peep into those recesses of her heart; but in her sorrow, she turned towards him, who, in her eyes, was her only consoler, and gave vent to earnest supplications:—

Oh, my God ! condescend to calm a soul that loves thee. If my heart, full of thy perfections, has never for a moment hesitated between the world and thee; if, in those moments when deluded man thinks he will enjoy himself, I was always disposed to quit this life without a regret, ordain that the inconstancy or the contumely of men do not draw from me comparisons which make me wish for heaven. Do not wrench from my heart a sentiment that is too dear to me ; but lessen, if thou so judgest right, the trouble that it has thus created. Allow me to open out my whole soul before thee, and if I am deceived in my fears, either give strength to my failing heart or else take me away from a place where everything is illusion. Precious dreams, perfect and unalterable love, what has become of you? For a long while I carried your image in my heart; for a long while I thought I had felt your presence as those sick people who give to every object the colour they think they see before them. But for a long while the veil has been tearing, and every day I see the sad truth more clearly. I have lost everything, and I thought I had found everything. A loving, honest, and affectionate heart beguiled me. I thought that character was the work of sentiment, but it is sentiment that is entirely the work of character. As soon as one is in opposition to the other the heart always yields. I have seen this to-day for the hundredth time, and the last proof of it is crueller than all the others. It takes from me those last remaining rays of hope, as a fresh blow upon a half-cured wound opens it again and renders it incurable. Let me see what I can do now that I have made this horrible discovery. What! can I not substitute one illusion for another? Rash woman that I have been, I have sacrificed everything to my fancy; I have brought all my strength to bear upon one object that now fails me, and I fall into an abyss. There is not even a branch to stop me. From ceaseless activity I come to total inaction. My dearest tastes are destroyed, or else they remain but in sentiment, and when that is once gone they perish with it. How shall I recover that taste for letters which when

alone made me forget time, the world, and myself also? All my thoughts call back a sentiment and give rise to some regret. My self-love has gone, and what does success matter to me now since I am alone to enjoy it? Wealth is as nothing without appreciation. All the varnish of life is rubbed off, and I think it ugly without its ornaments. Perhaps I carried about with me the means for my own destruction, and why should I make such an effort to counteract them? I feel immortality as I feel my own being; happiness is waiting for me. But what weakness rises up against my desire? If I am loved merely by loving nature, any other will fill . . . No, I cannot bear this idea. I am annoyed with my own wilfulness. I moan over poor humanity without having the strength necessary to throw it off. Let me try to keep my heart within itself, and to ignore that which is troubling it. Let me regret nothing . . .

This prayer, which Mme. Necker left unfinished, paints better than any words that I could use the sorrows she felt in those hours when she did not know how much reason she had to be happy, when she misunderstood her husband, and his great affection for her. In these moments every painful recollection would come back to her, and her torment was as that of delirium. She thought of those hard years in her youth which she had passed alone with her mother, and the remorse for grief which she feared to have caused her became for her another source of anguish. And now again she sought for rest in God's bosom; she placed her hope in the promises of a future life, and she trusted there to find that happiness which she thought was denied to her upon earth :—

Oh, my God! the best and most perfect of all beings, only source of my happiness, thou who hast created my soul that I might worship thee, thou knowest if I have ceased for one instant to deserve thy love. Ever bent upon pleasing thee, my earliest thoughts were devoted to thee, and my latest breath shall be directed towards thee. But if thou art my God, art thou not my father's also. Wilt thou not allow my broken heart to open itself before thee? I worship thee, and I lift up myself towards thee—my love diminishes the distance which separates us, for it is immense as the space itself. I am at the source of happiness, but it escapes far away from me like a rapid running river, and will soon be lost in an unknown precipice. Great God, who gave me my being, thou hast overwhelmed me with thy kindness. A virtuous and too tender mother caressed me in my infancy. Happy days in which I might make others happy, you are now gone from me. Oh! my mother, you are in the bosom of my God, and perhaps insensible to my troubles. Objects more worthy of your attachment have made you forget a beloved daughter. Ah! what a fearful idea! I will go near to the throne, and I will call back the tears that I have shed, and those that are now moistening my face. Alas! do you not recollect that you loved me so well? Stretch forth to me a hand of help from the heights of heaven. Death approaches and you are not near to me to hide from me the horror of it. Foreign hands will close my eyes. Alas! pardon me, I thought that a husband . . . But what heart can equal that of a mother's. Too long blinded by an inexpressible thought, I fancied that in the arms of hymen I should forget that my eyes were wedded to eternal tears. But sorrow and death have made me look for the maternal breast. That existed for me no longer, but instead I found only an awful solitude!

Who would think in reading these lines that a tone so pathetic could have been prompted by unjust suspicion. But in after years Mme. Necker herself recognised

that her imagination had led her very far astray, for when, not very long before her death, reading over again the recollections of her life, she came upon this fragment, she wrote upon the paper with a trembling hand:—

Oh! my husband, pardon me. I thought you had ceased to love me. I deeply wronged you. Receive my last breath.

Before time had brought to Mme. Necker that precious gift, the wisdom of the heart—a gift which it often bestows upon us in exchange for others taken away—more than one melancholy impression made itself felt within her. Besides the sufferings caused by bad health she felt herself overcome by that lassitude which in the middle of their lives is sometimes felt by ardent natures. "In youth," she used to say, "we enjoy the delights of life in the pleasures of friendship; in old age it is in the pleasures of friendship that we repose ourselves after the fatigue of life." This fatigue of life was often so strong within her that she wished for death; for to her, in her strong faith, death was but the entry into a better life. And she addressed to God this touching and humble prayer:—

Oh! my God, thou who seest this soft heart of one of thy creatures, allow me, if it be thy will, to say to thee, let me now, O Lord, rest in peace. What more can I do upon this earth? Thou knowest if I have loved, and if I still love, the husband

that thou hast given me; but his character, in spite of its great virtues, obliges him to seek his happiness away from me, and the wicked have poisoned his mind against our union, and have, perhaps, made him repent that he ever joined himself to me. I should now hope in vain to be the substitute myself for that worldly power which he would lose. My daughter no longer wants me to make her happy. Her tastes and mine are different, and she will soon cease even to regret me. For I hope that her affection, wholly given up to her father, will contribute to the enjoyment of his life. What then do I leave behind me upon the earth? The good things with which thou hast overwhelmed me? Oh! my God, I have gratefully enjoyed, but I return to thee all those good things thou hast given to me. Unhappy people? The little that I hope to do for them is ever thwarted by the envy of man; and have not the poor always a protection in thee? What else do I leave? An ungrateful country whose people I despise; a half worn out machine that seems to warn me every day of the moment of departure, that refuses all my thoughts, but which suggests to me others contrary to my reason. If it be thy will, oh! my God, close without pain a life that thou hast filled with thy most gracious favours, but which is embittered with remorse, with memories, with disdain, and with ingratitude. I hope that I may be pure before thee. My mother will not drive me back; perhaps she may share with me the transports of my joy. My father will stretch forth his arms towards his child, and high up in heaven we will prolong the days of the unfortunate man beaten by the storm, we will strengthen his virtue, and we will improve that of his daughter. My God, cast down upon thy creature a mark of thy goodness, and forgive the temerity of her prayer. Grant it or refuse it, but be not offended. Alive or dead, I put my trust wholly in thee.

If we compare this melancholy prayer, so resigned in its tone, with those which I have already given, so full

of bitter wailings, we may see that time had its due soothing effect upon the mind of Mme. Necker. This prayer was heard only too soon by those who loved her, and we shall see later on into what despair her death drove that fond husband whose affection she had at one time misunderstood. But before coming to this greatest heartrending pain Mme. Necker had to undergo another trial, of which we find a hint in the lines we have just read: the sorrow of knowing that her daughter's tastes were not the same as hers, and that the girl possessed perhaps more fully than she did the art of contributing to her father's happiness. In the pleasant prefatory notice which Mme. Necker de Saussure [1] published with the approbation and at the request of the children of Mme. de Staël, to be placed at the beginning of the collected works of her friend, she has touched with a delicate hand upon those differences of character and of humour which occasionally threw a cloud over the understanding that usually subsisted between the mother and the daughter. And upon these

[1] Albertine Andrienne de Saussure, a daughter of the great naturalist, born in 1765, had married in 1785 Jacques Necker, a captain in a French cavalry regiment, and a nephew of our M. Necker. Besides her *Notice sur la vie et les écrits de Mme. de Staël*, she wrote a *Traité de l'éducation progressive*, to which was awarded a prize by the French Academy. She died in 1801. There is a charming notice upon Mme. Necker de Saussure written by X. Doudan, published for the first time as an introduction to the *Éducation progressive*, and afterwards reprinted in the second volume of Doudan's correspondence.

indications malevolence has not been slow to create a current of thought that there was a permanent animosity existing between them, and that they each tried to rival the other in the affections of M. Necker, thus giving rise to frequent disputes in the domestic household. I may perhaps be allowed to reply to this mythical story by giving a few details as to the girlhood and education of Mme. de Staël. I can adduce documents which will serve to show that the difference of opinion never did interrupt the ties of fondness between the mother and the daughter, and that it was owing to the lessons given by Mme. Necker herself that Mme. de Staël was taught to regard her father as the first and foremost object in her life.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRLHOOD AND EARLY YEARS OF GERMAINE NECKER.

THE only child of M. and Madame Necker was born on the 22nd April, 1766. The last months preceding her birth filled her mother with inexpressible suffering and gloomy forebodings. She thought that she would not outlive the trial, and she feared to leave behind her alone in the world a husband whom she loved most tenderly and a motherless child. Preoccupied with these ideas she made such provisions as to ensure for her child the blessings of a Christian education, and also the soft nursing of a woman who would watch over her with a motherly care. Among the people with whom Mme. Necker became acquainted shortly after her arrival in Paris was a lady, the wife of the banker Vernet, in whose house of business M. Necker had first become initiated into all the intricacies of the business. M. Vernet came of a very old Geneva family,[1] and he

[1] The Vernet family came originally from Seyne in Provence. The citizenship of Geneva was given to André Vernet on the 2nd November,

was nearly related to the minister Jacob Vernet,[1] whose quarrels with Voltaire have caused his name to be now remembered. It was probably the recollection of the assistance shown by M. Vernet to her husband that encouraged Mme. Necker to ask Mme. Vernet to stand as godmother to her child, and also to promise to her a mother's love in case her own life was taken away. She therefore wrote and sent the following letter:—

My term is now approaching, madam, and that is a time sometimes fatal to life. I will not stay to think of this, for my love for my husband would make the notion fearful to me; but I think, nevertheless, I ought to take some precautions, as being a part of my duty, and the fact of doing so will also give me greater peace of mind. The maternal affection in me has become uneasy. And is anything better adapted to procure for it repose than to put in its place the cares of the purest and the most attentive virtue? That is a happiness which I am sure I shall obtain if you will become the godmother to our child, conjointly with M. Vernet and M. Necker.[2] If I die, my child then will

1559. (See Galiffe, *Notices généalogiques sur les familles genevoises.*) It was a member of this same Vernet family, that Adélaïde Charlotte Vernet (daughter of Isaac Vernet and Dorothée Piécet) married. Their marriage took place in 1825. A few months afterwards the husband was taken away from his wife, who died herself on the 11th December, 1876. She never married again, and left behind her an affectionate remembrance by every one who knew her.

[1] Jacob Vernet, a minister and professor at Geneva, was born in 1698 and died in 1789. He was very roughly handled by Voltaire, most especially in *La Guerre de Genève*, because he was opposed to Voltaire's opinions in the celebrated argument about the theatres.

[2] Louis Necker, born in 1730, a brother of our M. Necker, who afterwards called himself Necker de Germani, because of a small property he owned in the outskirts of Geneva. He succeeded his brother

not be motherless, and in this respect my heart will be at rest. I shall have fulfilled all my duties towards her. If God preserves my life your virtues will be to me as a model. You will direct the mother, and she will use all her care in making her child worthy of your friendship. These, madam, are the reasons which determined me to make this proposition to you. We have counted upon them in our hearts. I hope that you will not find that you have sufficient reason to make you refuse our request; your kindness towards my husband gives me already this assurance. M. Necker will have the honour to write to M. Vernet. Permit me now to offer him my warmest compliments.

PARIS, 19*th February.*

In spite of this pressing letter Mme. Vernet did not wish, or found herself unable, to make a favourable answer to the request that was demanded of her. Mme. Necker was therefore obliged to ask for the assistance of Mme. de Vermenoux. It was not the wife of M. Necker's first protector, but Mme. Necker's first protectress, who held the child in her arms at the baptismal font, and gave to her her own name, Germaine. As the French Protestants had not then a legal *locus standi*, it was in the chapel of the ambassador of the States General of Holland that the ceremony took place, and the act was couched as follows:—

DUTCH CHAPEL.

The twenty-seventh of April, one thousand seven hundred and sixty-six, Anne Louise Germaine, born in Paris, Tuesday, the

in the banking house, established himself for some years at Marseilles, and died in 1804.

twenty-second of April, one thousand seven hundred and sixty-six, daughter of noble Jacques Necker, citizen of Geneva, and of the noble lady Louise Suzanne Curchod, his wife; has had for her godfather M. Louis Necker, her paternal uncle, absent, and for godmother, Madame Anne Germaine Larrivée de Vermenoux, by whom she was held at the holy baptism, and was baptized on Sunday, the twenty-seventh of the said month and year in the chapel belonging to Their High Powers the Lords the States General of the United Provinces in the hôtel of his Excellency M. Lestevenon de Berkenroode, their Ambassador at the Court of France. Signed by me,

J. DUVOISIN, *Chaplain.*

When Germaine Necker came into the world the lessons set forth in *Émile*[1] were then exalting the imaginations of women to nurse their own children. Like many others, Mme. Necker wished to fulfil this act of duty, but owing to the weakness of her health she was obliged to abandon the attempt, though not without considerable regret. In after years she wrote to her husband: "I well remember those moments, to me full of charm, when the child to whom we had given life was brought to me on my bed, and her bright blue eyes would turn towards me and assure me by their colour, pure as the sky in heaven, of the happiness that was in store for me." Large handsome eyes, which so remained all her life, and a brilliant-coloured complexion, were among the principal charms of Germaine Necker in her infancy, and also in the days of her

[1] *Émile* had first appeared in 1762.

girlhood. She very soon began to exercise that sort of fascination which all through her life was her most powerful weapon, and of which those ladies who were her mother's friends felt the irresistible force. "I have just spent a few hours with your charming child," Mme. de Vermenoux wrote to Mme. Necker, "and I will at once share my happiness with you. She was in most excellent health, and full of delight and joyfulness. She received me wonderfully well, and commissioned me with a thousand things for you and for her papa, which only her mouth and her eyes could express."

But no one of Mme. Necker's female friends showed a more lively affection for little Germaine than Mme. d'Houdetot. It is not altogether uninteresting to see the connecting link, brought about by chance, between a woman who so well represents to our imagination the graces of days then past and gone and a child who in her eloquent tones would proclaim the bold features of a time then so near at hand. The short distance between Sannois and Saint Ouen more than once offered to Mme. d'Houdetot the opportunity of meeting little Germaine. She would send for her, or she went to see her when Mme. Necker was at Spa or at Mont Dore, and with maternal fondness she told the mother of the state of her child's health:—

I have been to see your child. She is in the best possible condition. Her fine eyes are very brilliant and very full of life. She has grown already, her flesh is firm, and her complexion is excellent. She has cut two of her front teeth; she is tolerably forward with the others. There is one that has grown bent a little inwards. I showed the nurse how, if she would press it lightly with her finger several times a day, the tooth would regain its place without further trouble. I asked that she might come to me sometimes, and I also shall be glad to go to see her. It gives me pleasure to kiss her. I have felt how far friendship makes our feelings sympathetic, and I thought I was holding in my arms my own child.

And in another letter:—

Another word about yourself and about your child. I examined her very carefully and I did not find any increase in that largeness of the right shoulder which was making you uneasy. When she walks her steps are perfectly equal, and that proves that there is no weakness on one side. I attribute the slight difference in the two shoulders to the more constant exercise of the right arm, which strengthens and enlarges that limb. I advised her nurse to make her use her left arm a great deal, so that if she appears to be somewhat left-handed when you see her you will be under an obligation to me.

Mme. d'Houdetot interested herself in Germaine Necker upon matters other than her teeth and her manner of walking. She watched very closely the precocious manifestations of this young mind, and in her infantine conversations or in her letters she found a pleasing charm which she could not resist imparting to her mother:—

Is it possible that I can look forward to the coming pleasure of kissing you, to offer my tender homage to one who has drawn from me a sort of worship, and to clasp in my arms that lovable girl in whom there are the seeds of every virtue as also of every charm, and (though you may again tax me with frivolity) whose graces have so attracted me, even those to which my age, the routine of my ideas, my situation in life, would seem to render me the least sensitive. Look with indulgence upon so many nice points springing up in her all at the same time, and choose from them those which you like best. . . . Tell her not to hide her playfulness when she writes to me, that she gives me much pleasure though I cannot always answer her, that I feel her presence, and that I say to myself that any one who has not the sentiments of the age in which we live is not only deprived of joining in the pleasures of his fellow-creatures, but that his mind is turned the wrong way. None of her graces are lost upon me. They are, my dearest friend, the flowers of your life; enjoy yourself in picking them. You know well enough how best to try and cultivate those which do not promise any fruit; but you will allow that her blossom promises to be abundant.

Of the correspondence that took place between Germaine Necker and Mme. d'Houdetot I have got unfortunately only a very small remnant. This is a letter written some years later by Mme. d'Houdetot, not to the young child but to the grown-up girl, but which nevertheless it may be well to reproduce:—

How am I to thank you, mademoiselle, for your kindness in promising to give me news of your mother, and also your wish to keep up your correspondence with me, a thing that gives me so much real pleasure. My affection for her, for your father, and for yourself, independently of other circumstances, does not need to be made warmer; but still I feel at present that I want some

outward signs of that affection. Your mother's illness, the sublime greatness to which your father has just raised himself[1] in the opinion of all reasonable and high-minded people, this touching sympathy, and this filial love which you show so plainly in your letter—all this, mademoiselle, makes me regard you and your parents as good and holy persons for whom one cannot help feeling a sort of worship as well as a strong sentiment of affection. . . . Heaven has largely endowed you, mademoiselle, in giving you such a father and such a mother; you have therefore a great duty to perform, but it will not be beyond your strength. You have all the graces and all the charms necessary to captivate; you will also have all the good qualities and all the virtues as their recompense.

Pardon me, mademoiselle, for the tone of this letter. In speaking to you of these things I have been led on to drop the ordinary tone of a letter; but they are so uncommon, they show themselves with so much brilliancy, and I am speaking to a girl very far beyond other girls both in intelligence and in the warmth of her heart. Tell me about yourself, mademoiselle; my letter will show you how much I want to hear from you, and how far my affection for you deserves to be repaid. Give my best love to your father and mother; assure them of my good wishes and of my most tender affection, which is now hidden in my tears. Again, once more, excuse the tone of this letter. If it were addressed to any other girl but you I know how far it would be misplaced; but your heart will judge me, and into your heart I pour out my own.

The child grew, and, according to Mme. d'Houdetot's expression, no young plant ever gave promise of finer fruit. We all know how precocious was the development of the intelligence and of the sensibility in the nature of this richly endowed child. A very often

[1] M. Necker had then quite lately published his book *l'Importance des Opinions Religieuses.*

quoted description of the *salon* of Mme. Necker shows us how the little Germaine sat by her mother's side upon a footstool, asking questions and answering those of the abbé Raynal, of Grimm, and of Marmontel, as they were ever ready to applaud her witty retorts; and how, when she was told to keep silence, she would follow with her large eyes the movements and the facial expression of those who continued to take part in the conversation. A portrait drawn in red chalk represents her about this uncertain time, between childhood and youth, and answers perfectly to the written description above alluded to. The face is not exactly one that we should call pretty. The nose is a little too long, and the mouth too large; but the eyes have in them a wonderful depth, the whole physiognomy sparkles with intelligence, and what is much better than the solemn portrait by Gerard, this crayon drawing of an unknown author (it may be Carmontelle) gives us the idea of how much charm vivacity in conversation can give to features that are not absolutely correct in their formation.

Among the men of letters who paid their court to little Germaine Necker, and who began to neglect the mother for the sake of the daughter, were the abbé Raynal and Marmontel. The abbé Raynal![1] Here we

[1] The abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal was born in 1713 at St. Geniez (Aveyron), and died in 1796. His best work, of which the full title is *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du*

see a light of past days now altogether blotted out! Here is another great man to whom posterity has obstinately refused to give its suffrage, and whom it has swept away into the same limbo of oblivion as the not less unfortunate Thomas! My kind readers need not take fright. I am not going to make the same distinction in favour of the author of *Histoire philosophique des deux Indes* as I did for the singer of *La Pétréide*, and I will not weary them by quoting those long letters which he addressed from time to time "to his young and handsome friend." But perhaps they may be glad to meet again their old acquaintance Marmontel, always obsequious, always gallant, and always rhyming verses. He had formerly addressed his lines to the Holy Suzanne; now it was for Germaine that he composed his songs, to the air *Je suis Lindor*, or else to the air *Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre*. Once when Mme. Necker was ill he immediately set to work to compose verses to celebrate her convalescence, which lines he made her daughter learn by heart:—

> Est-ce un bonheur d'avoir un cœur sensible?
> Le mien rend grâce au ciel, qui l'a formé;
> Mais quand on voit souffrir l'objet aimé
> Qu'un don si cher est un objet pénible!

commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, 4 vols. in 8vo. which met with a very great success, was, two years after it first appeared, burned by a decree issued by the Parliament. The book would nowadays find but few readers.

Tendre maman, vis pour l'enfant qui t'aime,
Vis pour l'époux qui t'est plus cher encor.
Ménage bien leur unique trésor;
Prend pitié d'eux en veillant sur toi-même.

Or he wrote for a little charade, in which the child had taken some part, couplets that were poor enough, and which terminated as follows :—

Si l'on s'étonne de m'entendre,
Parler raison, si jeune encor,
C'est que, dès l'âge le plus tendre,
J'eus ma Minerve et mon Mentor.
Mon secret n'est pas difficile.
Mon adorable et bon papa,
D'un trait par-ci, d'un trait par-là,
Éclaire mon esprit docile.
D'un trait par-ci, d'un trait par-là,
J'ai composé ce que voilà.

Marmontel was not the only man who felt himself driven to rhyme verses in order to please little Germaine Necker. At a time when versification was much in vogue there was hardly a gentleman who came much to the house who did not contribute his small homage, addressed either to Louise, to Mélanie, or to Aglaë.

Seul rejeton de Numa, d'Égérie,

as was said to her by one of the wits. Another celebrated the brightness of her eyes in a piece which he called *Les Yeux de Louise, ou le Peintre dans l'embarras.*

A third sent her some flowers and with them *Un Bouquet à Germaine*, which he terminated thus :—

> Comme elles, j'ai quitté les lieux qui m'ont vu naître,
> Comme elles, près de toi je veux vivre et mourir.
> Cette rose et mon cœur trouvent un nouvel être :
> Mon sort fut de t'aimer, le sien de t'embellir.

The disadvantages of this semi-public life for a girl of such quick parts did not escape the observation of Mme. Necker, and she tried to counterbalance the evil effects by the severity of the precepts which she gave to her daughter. Nor did the disadvantages escape the mind of that austere pedagogue, Mme. de Genlis, who said in her *Memoires:* "Mme. Necker brought up her daughter very badly in allowing her to spend the greater part of the day in her drawing-room surrounded by all the wits of the time, who crowded round her; and while the mother was busy talking to her guests, and to the ladies especially, the wits would take a pleasure in talking to the daughter about love, and about the other passions. The solitude of her own room and a few good books"—no doubt those which Mme. de Genlis herself had written—"would have been very much better for her." We may suppose, however, that Mme. de Genlis was not always struck with the bad education which Mme. Necker gave to her daughter, for she wrote to her once upon this same matter :—

If it be true that great examples can alone give strong and useful lessons, what woman, what mother, ever gave to her daughter a better education than that which Mlle. Necker has received from you? She has found in her paternal home everything that may implant in her the taste for virtue and for well-doing, and she has learnt to appreciate fully that consideration due to personal merit and to true greatness.

Though Mme. de Genlis, so severe in her *Memoires*, was right when she said in this letter that the examples given by a mother to her child are the best form of education, Mme. Necker herself was too scrupulous not to see fulfilled in a more direct way the first and most important duties of life. She was not the woman to imagine that any nature, however richly endowed, as generous and right-minded as it might be, ought to be allowed to follow its own instincts without other direction; nor did she believe that any natural gifts of intelligence ought to be held as sufficient excuse for refusing a sound and solid instruction. Hard work, conscientious feeling, and constrained effort had held such an important place in the early years of her own life, that it was not possible for her to think that she ought not to impose upon her daughter the same system of moral and intellectual training which she had herself undergone. She would allow no one to come between her and her child, and she undertook therefore to transmit to her the same lessons which she herself had previously received from her own father. A few years

later, thinking that her husband did not fully render her justice in the trouble she took with her child, Mme. Necker, in a letter, reminded him of all the care she had bestowed :—

During the thirteen best years of my life, in addition to many other important occupations, I never lost sight of her. I taught her languages, and especially how to speak her own with facility. I strengthened her memory and her mind by the best kind of exercises. I took her alone with me into the country during those journeys to Versailles and to Fontainebleau ; I used to walk about with her ; I read with her ; I used to play with her. Her health broke down. My uneasiness and my solicitude gave fresh zeal to her doctor ; and since then I have discovered that she used to feign fits of coughing, to which she was subject, that she might enjoy better the warm affection I showed to her. In a word, I always cultivated and increased those gifts which she had received from nature, thinking that her soul would benefit by my teaching, and my self-love. I was transported with pride because of my great love for her.

During these thirteen years, in which the pupil profited to a remarkable extent from the lessons she received from such a devoted mistress, no cloud arose to trouble their intercourse, and the archives of Coppet contain many proofs of the affection which bound them together. Mme. Necker was rarely separated from her daughter, though she was occasionally obliged to leave her at Saint Ouen when some important affair demanded her own presence in Paris. The child, who at this early age had an invincible horror of being

left alone, tried to escape from the feeling of sadness by writing fond letters to her mother. From some of these I shall make a selection. The handwriting is always crude, the spelling sometimes bad, but the infantine thoughts find means to express themselves often happily enough :—

Saturday Evening.

MY DEAR MAMMA,

I want to write to you. My heart is drawn tight; I am sad; and in this large house, which only a few days since contained everything that was dear to me, in which my whole world and my future was confined, I see now only a desert. I see now, for the first time, that this great space is too large for me, and I run into my little room, so that I should not see the void that surrounds me. This short absence makes me tremble as to my destiny. You can find in yourself, my dear mamma, numberless consolations, but I can find only you. There is my reason, my courage; and I feel that your lessons have taught me to regard you as that virtue itself which you were teaching to me. We should be a hundred times happy if we followed only the examples of people we love; but should I have cherished virtue if you had been wicked? I detest this ball and all my frivolous tastes; I made a great mistake when I thought I should amuse myself there. Could I think that when far away from you I should then have the same eyes?

I am, with respect, my dear Mamma,

your most loving daughter,

NECKER.

MY DEAR MAMMA,

Since you have left me I have been as happy as it was possible for me to be away from you; but still it is only poor happiness. If anything could replace the great void that is left in my heart it would be when another sentiment, much less strong, (the comparison would be unreasonable) comes to remind

me sweetly how much I love you. When I feel affection for others this is the effect that it produces upon me. I tell you this as though I were stealing something from you, for though I try with all my force I cannot worship you as I do papa.

Mlle. Huber[1] arrived yesterday evening, as you see, dear mamma, and she will stay with me until to-morrow. Saturday is still a long way off, as I shall not see you until then. I talk to you of nothing else but of your being away. Forgive me; but what else would you wish me to think about? When I am away from you I am always sorry that I cannot see you, and when I have this pleasure I do not then think of anything else. Yes, mamma, though I were to see you for a thousand years, and you were to be an instant away from me, I think I should then become jealous. Adieu, my dear mamma! In spite of all my follies, allow that you are beloved as—what is the strongest expression I can use?—as you deserve to be loved. Let me kiss you a thousand times, and press you to a heart that belongs only to you and to papa.

I am, with respect,
Your very humble and very obedient daughter,
NECKER.

P.S.—We send you the sweetest flowers we can find in the garden.

Germaine Necker in her letters to her mother did not always tell her how much she loved her; sometimes she wrote to express her sorrow for some light faults of which she accused herself, as though she had committed a crime :—

[1] Mlle. Huber, afterwards Mme. Rilliet, was a very early friend of Mme. de Staël's. She has left a journal containing some interesting details of their childhood, from which Mme. Necker de Saussure has borrowed some few facts.

MY DEAR MAMMA,

It is with difficulty I make up my mind to write to you. If I felt myself worthy of you, worthy of your lessons, I should be overjoyed to report to you my progress, and to thank you for it every day; but when I can only tell you with shame and confusion that I have fallen into the old faults, my pen drops from my fingers, and I become discouraged and very unhappy. Yes, my dear mamma, will you believe it, I fell yesterday into my ordinary temper, and again this morning also, about something else. Do not ask me for all the details; I am already troubled enough in speaking of all these small plaguy matters. It seems to me that in writing about it I am only making the fault worse, and that then I shall not be able to forget it. And I distrust my own weakness, for I fear that in writing I should keep anything from you; and yet I cannot tell you everything. I wish to be able to tell you only of my faults, why should I not be able to tell you also of the victories that I have gained over myself? Ah, mamma, my dear mamma, correct me!

It is now very fine, and that prevents me from saying more, as I have no one who can wait until this evening.

Adieu, dear mamma! Allow me to kiss you.

Your very respectful and very obedient daughter,

MINETTE NECKER.

To these letters, so natural and honest-minded even in their exaggerations, Mme. Necker always answered in an equal and affectionate tone. But in her replies we see that there was ever present to her mind the idea—an idea which doubtless was most proper, but which was perhaps too constantly before her—to take every advantage of perfecting her daughter's education, and also of impressing upon the girl to listen always to good advice. The tone of some few of these letters

will explain better than any commentaries the difference of the two natures, and may also serve to explain those misunderstandings which existed between them a few years later.

15th May, 1779.

I flattered myself, my dear little one, that I should be able to go to see you to-day; but as you interest yourself in my health you would not wish me to go out at a time when the air may be so pernicious to me. I shall therefore be shut up for three days. I am very sorry that you should begin by remaining so much alone, but I have hopes in your taste for study, in your understanding, and in the kind interest Mlle. B—— takes in everything you do. I advise you to walk about a great deal, to enjoy all those country tastes which soften and simplify the heart. We do not lose our time in gaining our health, and in accustoming ourselves to those innocent pleasures which give us a dislike to the pomp of towns, and which may be enjoyed by people of all ages and of all conditions. Your letter is that of a good child. I see that you are pleased with yourself, and therefore I am satisfied, for I do not want any judge between you and me but your own heart; but your style is rather high-flown. Do not go so much beyond yourself to praise me and to caress me. This shows a want of taste, common enough at your age. When one has lived longer one sees that the true way to please and to interest people is to describe one's thoughts exactly, without affectation, and without display. In that way there is always something in us that is original, and there is in what we say the stamp of truth which loses itself in comparisons that are too far-fetched. Your letter to your father was simple and nicely written.

Adieu, my child! tell me that you are fond of me, and show it to me by improving every day your heart and your understanding, in always making some sacrifices for yourself, by raising up your soul by religion, and by contributing to the happiness

of all people with whom you have anything to do, so that you may also especially contribute to mine. I exhort you to be obedient. Beg Mme. Martin so to give orders that every one may be busy, that Thérèse and the other girls do not waste all their time in idleness, for that would afterwards make them unhappy.

This letter was written, my dear one, when I received your flowers and your nice little note. You will see that I was beforehand with you in my affectionate complaints. Adieu, my angel I thank you very much for your kind attention.

10th June, 1779.

I never stop coughing altogether, my little one; but I should like that you would not exaggerate anything, even in the way of sentiments. You know that you must always court that superior intelligence which I value so highly, which will be useful in every object, and which can never come amiss. You must early accustom yourself to pass several days consecutively in solitude and in hard work. You know very well that, far from putting obstacles in the way of your innocent pleasures, I am always glad to forward them; but still I am firmly persuaded that when one has accustomed oneself to amusement to such an extent that one cannot easily do without it, one is then in real slavery, and incapable of doing anything great, or even anything that is good.

You need not be uneasy about the visit that you have missed. I should have been delighted had you come to Saint Ouen; but there was no one there who came to see you. It was a party of friends who met first at Saint Denis; they then went on to the Duc de Gèvres' property, and afterwards on to yours, for the sake of seeing the garden. What do you mean by a visit in the course of the year? You do not appear to take into account any others, but those of the foreigners, who are wholly indifferent as to your existence. The end of your letter is more loving and more rational; but in all your vagaries my affection for you makes me believe that I see the last remnants of folly, and that your

good heart and common sense will fight against it, and will in the end be victorious. This is the constant wish of the most affectionate of mothers.

11th June, 1779.

I write another scrap, my dearest little one, to console you in your solitude. You tell me artfully enough of all the little foolish things that you have done. But the watchful eye of the good mother likes the openness of a confession better than the subterfuges of self-love. However, we will say nothing of what is past and done; let us think of the future, and I like to flatter myself that you will give me much cause for satisfaction. If you wish that I should not think your expressions of love to be exaggerated, you have before you a method easier and more useful than any that the French language can afford you: you have only to do in my absence all that I should desire for your health, physically and morally. If your words and your actions always agree, any suspicion of exaggeration will then be destroyed, and I assure you that you may then tell me the warmest and the sweetest things, and I shall only think my happiness to be greater when I hear them.

I shall see you very late on Saturday. Beg of Mlle. B—— not to arrange for the ball before speaking to me. Adieu, my dear child.

Germaine Necker was hardly more than thirteen years old when her mother advised her "to court that superior intelligence which is useful in every object, and which can never come amiss." Just at that age she fell very ill. Fits of weakness came upon her, and they were followed by periods of nervous over-excitement. Her parents became uneasy, and called in Tronchin, the physician who attended upon Voltaire, upon the fashionable ladies, and all

the wits of the town. Tronchin ordered a complete change in the mode of life—no work, no more conversation, mental repose, absolute liberty, and residence in the country. The young girl was taken to Saint Ouen, where she was left alone with her friend Mlle. Huber, while her father and mother were retained in Paris at the Hôtel du Contrôle Générale. In this solitary retreat, free from all supervision, she was able to give herself up entirely to her own tastes. Mme. Necker de Saussure says of her that "she walked up and down in the woods with her friend, the two girls dressed as nymphs, and there they would declaim verses, compose poems and dramas of every kind, which they immediately used to act, one before the other."

This alteration in her educational schemes was a source of much trouble to Mme. Necker. All through her life she was possessed with the idea that her daughter had irreparably lost a great deal owing to this temporary suspension in the lessons that she was giving to her child; and when a few years later Mme. Necker de Saussure complimented her upon the very great talents which every one remarked in her daughter, she made the following somewhat curious rejoinder: "It is nothing, absolutely nothing, beside what I had hoped to make of her." But this imaginary disappointment was small in comparison with the deeper pain

which Mme. Necker felt in perceiving that her child was gradually emancipating herself from the influence of her authority. Like a young horse, let free from control, who no longer feels the bit in his mouth and who no longer recognises the hand of a master, the child gave way to all the ardour of her imagination, to the whims of her mind, and to the petulance she felt at this moment. Her mother became disconcerted and was made very unhappy, for the indulgence which on the other hand was shown to her by her father encouraged her towards breaking out into rebellion. It was from this time that we may date the close intimacy between the father and the daughter. Up till that time the intercourse between M. Necker and little Germaine had hardly exceeded that which a man absorbed all day by the weight of his business might feel for a child who was also much occupied with her lessons. But when, during those first brilliant and arduous years of public life, M. Necker, as he sat by his own fireside in the evening after he had done his day's hard work, found a child, almost a grown up girl, playing round about him and showing off her charms and the wonderful powers of her mind to procure for him a moment of distraction and of pleasure, the sentiment of love and of paternal affection could not but rise and swell in his heart and close his eyes to the harmless follies of her

exuberant nature. There was in the character of Germaine Necker a touch of drollery and gaiety of heart, for which her mother reproached her, thinking it to be an incentive to idleness, but which, on the other hand, in spite of the gravity of his demeanour, responded to certain sides of her father's nature. One day Mme. Necker had been called from the breakfast table for some matter that required her attention, and when she returned she was much surprised to find her husband and her daughter both dancing round the table with their napkins tied round their heads in the form of a Turkish turban. She looked at them with an astonished air, and they, like two school children caught while they were playing some prank, sat down without either of them proffering a word.

M. Necker did not always show this tacit complicity, and when he thought that his wife scolded her daughter too severely he openly took the child's part. The girl then took a wilful pleasure in relying upon her father's authority against her mother's wishes, and it was this support given by M. Necker to his daughter's caprices that (as far as we can dive into the recesses of the heart) made Mme. Necker suffer much more than the feeling of jealousy, of which people have not been slow to accuse her. In her confidential journals, which she intended for no other eyes but her own, she never attributes

that which she unjustly calls the coldness of her husband to the predilection he showed to his daughter, and if she alludes to such predilection it is in expressing the hope that she may after her death leave less of an open space vacant in her husband's heart. But in point of fact she thought that her daughter was doing that which was not right; she was annoyed at the opposition shown to her advice; and this annoyance made her sad at heart when M. Necker somewhat thoughtlessly rebuked her for the counsel she gave to her child. But though upheld by her father, the girl often reasoned with much shrewdness, and she would sometimes render justice to her mother. One day when a visitor said, awkwardly enough, "Your father appears to love you more than your mother," she answered at once: "My father thinks more of my present happiness, my mother thinks of my happiness in the future."

If M. Necker was indulgent, he was not also a blind father. His penetrating glance was quick to perceive pretension, vanity, and folly; and his strong mind was not averse to a pleasing and mild form of correction. Mme. de Staël said in later years, "I owe the frankness of my character and the openness of my mind to the incredible penetration that I observed in my father. He would unmask all affectation, and I learned from

him the habit of believing that which people saw plainly in my heart." M. Necker did not flatter all the tastes of his daughter. Among others he tried to fight against a vocation for literature which she developed very early in life; and when he saw her, at fifteen years of age, wholly absorbed in writing a tale or a play he called her M. de Sainte Écritoire. And he was not far from eradicating this taste in her. The following is an extract from a journal which she kept when she was nineteen years old:—

My father is right. How little are women adapted to follow the same career as men! Can we contend against them, and excite in them a jealousy so different from that inspired by feelings of love? A woman ought to have nothing of her own; she ought to find all her enjoyments in him that she loves. I can imagine Mme. de Montesson[1] shedding tears when she saw the failure of her play. And what an effect tears have upon us when it is our own sensitiveness that makes them flow! If they could only be blue, yellow, and of different colours, I might cry often enough. But the same tears always come for self-love and for affection; it is horrible to think of it!

In spite of all this, M. Necker's influence was not sufficiently strong to prevent his daughter drawing

[1] Charlotte Jeanne Béraud de la Haie de Riou, Marquise de Montesson, born in 1739, died in 1798, was clandestinely married to the Duke of Orleans. On the 6th of May, 1785, a play of hers, entitled *La Comtesse de Chazelles*, was performed at the Théâtre Français, but it was a complete failure, and had to be withdrawn. The Duke of Orleans was so modest in the demands he made in her favour, that people said of him that because he could not make her Duchess of Orleans he made himself M. de Montesson.

his portrait. It was just at the time when Mme. Necker traced in writing that portrait which her husband afterwards singularly enough published at the end of her *Pensées et Mélanges.* Stirred up by emulation, Germaine Necker wished also, in treating of this same subject, to show the power which she felt to be daily growing stronger within her, and which she had already exercised in writing short tales and plays. Before proceeding to the portrait of her father she began:—

I am choosing a subject that is beyond my strength; but when I have written everything that I can say, I shall still feel all that which was impossible for me to say, and I shall know better than any one else how far I have been from expressing everything. I therefore ask beforehand that justice may be accorded to me; and if nature has not given to me that burning style which puts the warmest emotions into the heart, let not people think that what I write is to be measured by what I feel.

Appointed to judge between the two rivals, M. Necker refused to pronounce an opinion; but his daughter thought that she guessed his sentiments, for she wrote in her journal: "He admires mamma's portrait very much, but mine flatters him the most."

CHAPTER III.

THE MARRIAGE.

DURING these years, that were somewhat painful to Mme. Necker, a new incident occurred that did not make matters run smoother between her and her daughter. The child had grown ; adolescence had followed youth, and at a time when girls were married early in life, her parents naturally thought much of her future position. It was not, in point of fact, an easy matter to marry at the court of Louis XVI. a girl belonging to the *so-called reformed* religion. Since the powerful hand of Louis XIV. had brought back all the nobility into orthodox habits, there was no one among the Protestants in France who was in a position to aspire to win the hand of Mlle. Necker. It would have been useless to think of marrying her to a Catholic at a time when the marriage ceremony was purely religious, and at a time also when not one member of the Church could have been found to

consent to that which we now call a mixed marriage. It was therefore the destiny of Germaine Necker either to marry a Genevese, a countryman of her father's, (perhaps M. and Mme. Necker were indulging in the hopes of a more brilliant career for their daughter than that of the Genevese aristocracy in their fine and gloomy-looking houses of the streets in the high part of the town), or some foreigner, the subject of a Protestant sovereign. It must also be admitted that Mme. Necker was, and with reason, difficult to please. She wished for a man who not only would love her daughter and appreciate her high qualities, but one who also thought much of the honour of becoming M. Necker's son-in-law. She wished that by the brilliancy of his position abroad the husband of her daughter should enhance the power that her own husband then held in France. She wished in a word that he should spread around about them all a halo of glory. In her opinion a man should have these qualifications if he wished to become the son-in-law of M. Necker. But no such desirable personage had as yet presented himself, and M. and Mme. Necker saw their daughter approach her eighteenth year, not perhaps without some concern, when, at Fontainebleau, where they had followed the court, they met Lord Chatham's second son, William Pitt.

This man certainly carried with him a halo of glory, in the name which he bore and also in the fire of genius that already showed itself in his eyes. At little more than twenty-three years of age, he had already been Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Rockingham's ministry,[1] and he was so highly thought of in England that no one doubted but that he would very shortly be placed at the head of affairs. This then was the ideal son-in-law to Mme. Necker's mind, and her imaginations soon grew warm when the idea of bringing about such a union was once fixed in her thoughts. He possessed all the qualifications which she had thought desirable: religion, name, position, and great talents. How high would be the influence of M. Necker in France if he gave his daughter to the man who would perhaps one day be England's first minister! But when she opened the matter to her daughter, in spite of all that there was in such a marriage attractive to a young imagination, she found that she met with an invincible repugnance. Are there in reality, as certain clever dreamers would have us believe, mysterious presentiments, which come to us suddenly in the night to

[1] Charles Watson Wentworth, Marquis of Rockingham, was one of the principal statesmen of the Whig party who came into office after Lord North in 1782. But he died not long afterwards, and his death brought about a dissolution of the ministry in which William Pitt had been a member.

lighten for us our dark road with a ray of beneficent light? It is certain that either instinct or chance gave better counsel to the daughter than human wisdom did to the mother. At a later date when some one thought well to offer congratulations to her whom Napoleon I. had unjustly banished, after her persecutor had fallen, and that she would soon be able to come back again into France, she answered rather testily: "Why should you congratulate me? Is it because I am driven to despair?" If she had married William Pitt her life would have been one of long despondent hopelessness to feel herself, she so thoroughly and truly French, so faithful to the principles of the Revolution, indissolubly united to one who was the implacable enemy not only of the Revolution, but also of France. But at a time when parents were accustomed—and this should be borne in mind—to take upon themselves the whole responsibility of the marriage of their children, this refusal of her daughter appeared to Mme. Necker to be wilful caprice; and this fresh resistance to her wishes, in so grave a circumstance, appeared to her to be another sign of her daughter's want of dutiful affection and obedience.[1]

[1] In his *Life of William Pitt* Lord Stanhope has spoken of this projected marriage, but he does not believe that such designs were contemplated, nor does he give credence to the theatrical reply that Pitt is supposed to have made: "I am already married to my country."

In the following year Mme. Necker, whose health was always weak, again became very ill. She was advised to go to Montpellier, where she would receive the attentions of a Doctor Lamurre, then a well-known physician. All her friends were uneasy about her. Mme. Necker thought that her end was coming, and she prepared herself as though she were going to die. In a pathetic letter which she wrote to her husband, full of painful expressions that she was about to leave him, assuring him also of the deep affection which she always felt that he had ever shown to her, she becomes alarmed at the thought of his affliction, though at the same time she thanks God for having spared her weakness from the trial of outliving one who had been to her so dear a husband. And at the same time she wrote loving and solemn counsel to her daughter, in which we may see that certain wounds she had keenly felt had not in the least estranged her solicitude or maternal affection.

Pay attention, my child, to the last wishes and the last orders of your mother. Recollect that you should regard them as though they were almost sacred. You may perhaps reproach yourself for certain instances in your conduct towards me if you compare them with the pleasure that you might have given to me;

Lord Stanhope was fully justified in doubting that this answer should have been made by Pitt, for, as we have seen, the question was not put to him; but it is quite certain that the marriage was contemplated Wilberforce speaks of it in his *Memoirs*.

but if I now awaken in your heart any feelings of remorse, I would also tell you how you may always appease it. You may yet repair everything, and make me more happy after my death than it was in your power to do during my lifetime. I leave to your father all those claims that I had upon your affection, and also those that are already his. Be to him, if it is possible, as was that heart which upon earth lived only for him. You have also other duties, but they all depend upon that one duty. Stay with him, and in his grief do not go from him. If for consolation he pours out his wailings before you, bear up against them. Find out those things that may calm his imagination, and tear him away from solitude, however much he may oppose you. Let him observe the trust I put in him, that he keep my ashes, one day to be mixed with his; but also let not this care occupy him too fully. Go with him when he may come to shed a few tears upon my tomb; join your own also, and you may think that you have made me the happiest of mothers.

Oh! my child, what can you find in all this world to give you greater satisfaction than that you will feel when you say: I am obedient to my God, I give consolation to the best of fathers, and I render to my mother's memory that homage which she would have wished from me. Yes, you see me now upon those boundaries which separate life from eternity; I place my hand upon one and upon the other to attest both the existence of a God and the happiness we receive from living well. I did desire that you should marry Mr. Pitt. I wished to confide you to the care of a husband who had made for himself a great name; I would also wish for a son-in-law into whose care I could recommend your poor father, and who would feel the full weight of his charge. You were not disposed to give me this satisfaction. Well, all is now forgiven if you will give to your father and to yourself all those things that I had hoped for in this union. Exert yourself so as to produce those distractions which England, the thought of having a son-in-law, and the labour of business, would have given to your father. Wherever he wishes to go, follow him; live in his house; do not allow, unless

there be some imperative necessity, that he sleep under any other roof than that under which you are living. Give yourself up to your good instincts; you will be wrong only when you depart from them; and you may believe me that your father's kiss and your mother's blessing, both sent down to you from heaven, will be sweeter to you than very many words of praise. Leave this world that you have but ill known; live for God, for your father, and for your other duties. You will see how much sweeter are the enjoyments of the heart than those of self love. Oh! my child, your character is not yet formed; your head often leads you astray; take religion for your guide and try to live as it teaches you. Your task is a great one. Upon earth I lived only for your father, for you were for me a part of his own self; and you must now take my place beside him. You will one day be a wife and a mother; to unite these duties to the first one, teach your husband and your children that your father must be for them the centre of everything upon earth. You will then become the treasure common to them all. Your joint prayers will come up into heaven and I shall hear them.

It is the unhappy privilege of death to purify and enlarge the heart. It may be that in the education which she gave to her daughter Mme. Necker fell into the error of wishing to model her too much upon her own form, and that she did not understand that we must allow to youth its originality and its independence; it may be also that in certain circumstances she was too much guided by personal feelings, and that she did not soon enough recognise that the weaning of the bird from the nest is one of the most important objects in life. But when she thought herself to be on the point of death, this pure and warm-hearted woman felt for herself no

sorrow and no regret; her only thought was how she might best soften the pain which her loss would cause to those who lived after her, and she therefore enjoined her daughter to fill after her death that place in the heart of her husband which perhaps she herself had suffered to see disputed with her. She consented that she should be forgotten, provided that her husband might be less unhappy.

Mme. Necker escaped from this crisis, and her written counsels, which I found among her papers, were probably never seen by her daughter; but the uneasiness which Germaine Necker felt for her mother's bad health brought about between them a touching scene which drew near together those two natures so widely different that they never quite understood each other, and yet so similar as not to prevent them from clashing one against the other by the very fact of their similarities. I take the narrative of this scene from the journal kept by the young girl.

12th August.

I felt yesterday much painful anxiety; mamma has passed latterly some very bad nights. I went to her to ask her how she was, and she answered me in a very sad and sorrowful tone. She showed so much uneasiness as to the worry that my father must feel from seeing her in a continual state of ill-health, that she almost made my heart bleed. I reassured her by every means that my affection for her and true speaking could suggest to me; but, touched at the bottom of my heart by a horrible

thought—one that was false, altogether false, thank God!—I fell down upon my knees. "The Supreme Being," I said, "will hear our prayers so lasting and so earnest: I am sure he will, I am sure he will." I was stifled with my tears and was almost fainting. "Ah!" my mother cried, "you have now made me happy for a long time." I at once left her, and did not return again all that morning. I never again spoke to her of that moment. There come to us at times sudden and involuntary inspirations, and it seems, if we were to relate them, that they would at once lose all their charm. And I did not wish to repeat again such a painful scene. The sentiment is in one's heart, even though a combination of circumstances do not force it to show itself, or although one is able to keep it concealed. My mother said to my father, "I have again found in your daughter the tenderness and the natural disposition she showed when she was a child." "I think," my father answered, "that she has never lost it." Ah! I have no doubt that though my mother's character is less sympathetic with my own than my father's, I love her with that sort of affection which might at first be thought only to be a cold love, but I feel in me love of a much stronger nature. Why is it that this wretched England has brought against me all mamma's hardness and all her coldness? Hateful island, the present source of all my fears, the future source of my remorse, why must all these brilliant offers have come to take from me the right to bewail my lot, and yet to make it for me the more unbearable? Why must these offers have been forced upon me to choose, to decree that which I should have so much liked to have been obliged to do, and to plunge me into such terrible uncertainty that there is no argument that cannot be combated by another. I have not changed outwardly, because an impulse of my heart has carried me along; but I am only agitated, frightened. . . . Ah! it is all over. I cannot go to England.

This journal, from which I have already quoted several fragments, was unfortunately kept only for a short time

by Germaine Necker. For a few weeks she put down regularly all the small events in her daily life, her personal impressions, and she gives a narrative of conversations which she heard take place in her mother's drawing-room at Saint Ouen. On the first page there is written this epigraph taken from one of the works of M. Necker: "The heart of man is a picture, which we must look at from the proper distance at which the wise ordainer of nature has placed it." Immediately underneath Germaine wrote these words: "Turn over the leaf, papa, if you dare, when you have read this epigraph. Ah! I have placed you so near to my heart that you ought not to envy me this small degree of greater intimacy that I keep with myself." The reader may perhaps be glad that I should give a few more fragments. I will first show a portrait of the Maréchale de Beauvau, that kind and noble lady who disputes with Mme. Necker the honour of showing to the eighteenth century the model of conjugal affection,[1] and also a judgment passed upon the Duc de Choiseul who had then died quite lately.

[1] Marie Charlotte de Rohan Chabot was, by her first marriage, Comtesse de Clermont d'Amboise, and, by her second marriage, wife of the Maréchal Prince de Beauvau. She was born in 1729, and died in 1807. For details concerning them see *Souvenirs de la Maréchale Princesse de Beauvau* (Paris, Techener), a book that was collated with much skill and delicacy of taste by the great-granddaughter of the Maréchal, Mme. Standish, *née* Noailles, and which was published by her children.

21st July.

How painful it is to me to awake myself! Ah! it cannot be true happiness to fear to begin the day, to dread the moment when memories return back into the heart, and to prefer to life an image of annihilation. Sleep often makes me tremble; the soul and the body, both immovable, appear to have a destiny too much alike. But no, no! The feeling of one's own self still subsists, and it is that which characterises our moral existence.

Mme. de Beauvau came yesterday to pay us a visit before going to Ségrais. What an infinite charm there is in that woman! It is nothing which lifts you out of yourself or above yourself, but it is in your ordinary condition of mind that you feel one of those great pleasures that conversation can give. She is simple by nature, her mind is rationally disposed, showing facility rather than ease of manner. She has the tastes of a lady of distinction, but these seem to come rather because she shows herself to be what she is than because she sees others such as they are; consequently, she has the same manners with people in different ranks. I do not say the same speech, for that would be to confound persons. She knows perfectly what each one's dispositions are, and she does not perceive our follies—a true sign of goodness which makes every one feel to be at ease with her. She does not, I think, generalise ideas very much, but she is exceedingly interesting when she is talking of a man or about an event of importance, making others think more than she thinks herself, but only because she has not allowed sufficient time for her thought to develop itself; but she has also more instinct than power of reflection. She has certainly a great deal of imagination, and yet I feel sure that all her friends do not credit her with this quality; for the power of and the drawback to imagination comes from the faculty of inventing, and it cannot show itself but with excessive reality. She takes note of all the small things she has seen; and one would say that she has purposely made choice of those circumstances most likely to be of interest. There are women fonder of their husbands than she is

of hers, but they exaggerate their love; and as we do not know how much is exaggeration, though they may love more ardently, they still produce a smaller effect than Mme. de Beauvau. We were comparing her with Mme. de Gramont.[1] She told me in confidence that somebody thought that she was truer than Mme. de Gramont, but that Mme. de Gramont was more sincere. This is a nice distinction. It seemed to me, and I said so to Mme. de Beauvau (for one might so speak to her) that the natural tone in Mme. de Gramont struck me more forcibly than in herself, because Mme. de Gramont shows her failings, and her natural qualities then tell in her favour; but because one would rather choose to be what Mme. de Beauvau is by nature, this quality in her is less highly praised. Her intelligence does not show itself in flashes. I am not astonished that her power of mind and that of Mme. d'Houdetot do not agree. But it is natural to her to be witty in conversation. Wit comes to her as beauty to women. Sometimes, however, she will begin to talk about the various dishes upon the table, entering into a thousand small details. And even then it seems that the goodness of her disposition gives a pleasant turn to what she says, and I think that she rather likes to show herself off in talking about things both grave and gay. It is not given to every one to be able to go from one serious subject to another. And she likes the contrast between conversations of different kinds. I should myself prefer that we did not let our thoughts rest idle unless we were engaged in some graceful employment, that we should try to improve our eloquence except when we are amusing ourselves, and that dulness should never find any countenance among us.

The esteem she has for M. le Dauphin, his affection for her; her opinion about M. de Choiseul, which she meant to have written; the lucky star in his life and his reputation; audacity rather than high courage; an extraordinary power of trusting,

[1] Béatrix de Choiseul Stainville, Duchesse de Gramont (not Grammont), sister of the Duc de Choiseul, was born in 1730. She died upon the scaffold, 17th April, 1794.

which the event has justified; winning once, when with the army, a hundred thousand crowns at play; setting up his house with this money, and keeping it up always until his death; generosity in his sentiments; excessive pride; not much intelligence, it may seem strange to say, but still happy with that which he has; wonderful strokes of good fortune in business matters, but no power of reasoning; more easy to govern by choosing the proper moments than by using arguments or eloquence; his sister superior to himself; his mortification at having to humble himself towards the end of his life until he borrowed money of Beaumarchais,[1] and of Foulon,[2] whom he had formerly treated as he deserved;—all these traits were in him which seem to make a man more noble than great, happier than distinguished, not being able to take effect, except during his life, upon the French nation, generous in more than a usually accepted sense of the word, governed by impulse instead of by principle, and perhaps more fickle than sensitive, and weak-minded rather than good.

Although these two portraits are not unworthy of the author of *Delphine*, yet the most interesting pages of this journal are those in which Germaine Necker, her mind filled with some strong impression, writes down hastily and vividly her emotions and her imaginary fears.

[1] In the two interesting volumes by M. de Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son Temps*, there is no mention made of the demands for money that the disorder in his affairs forced upon M. de Choiseul to make to Beaumarchais.

[2] Joseph François Foulon, born at Saumur in 1715, was successively at the head of the commissariat in the army, intendant to the army, and Councillor of State. For a short time in 1781 he was thought of as M. Necker's successor at the General Control Office. He became odious to the people, who accused him of monopolising the corn; he was massacred on the 2nd July, 1789.

28th July.

What a horrible spectacle appears before me as I awake. My bed appears to be a bier covered with a white sheet, in the middle of the courtyard, in front of the resting-place of her whom they have just buried. It is her, those are her limbs, those are her features. What has happened? Those who love her suffer that the earth should have for ever closed over her.

I again see this good woman in her country garments, sparkling with life, robust, light-hearted, not defiant of the future, at fifty years of age married to a man younger than herself, who loved her and whom she loved, overjoyed with the return of spring at the end of her autumn days, grateful for the unexpected happiness, devoted to the troubles of unfortunate people, made perfect by felicity, an angel in her happiness—a spectacle as beautiful and more lovely than an angel in misfortune. An infectious malady, the smallpox, seized her, and she dies, and her body occupies the same place that it had done during her lifetime! To have seen alive her whom they have just buried would have been enough to make one shudder all over at such a spectacle. Above her room there was a clock, and knowing her to be in her last moments, every time I heard this clock I cried, "That is the last note she will hear. A soul is going to heaven; she will learn that of which all the great men are ignorant." What an image of disgust and terror death in general gives to us. Hers did not leave quite the same impression; a feeling of regret, a consoling hope, was the effect produced. Destruction, that terrible thought, no longer strikes the mind; our soul beforehand leaves the body, which time itself will consume. But the death of one that one loves! If these ideas are sombre to the thoughts, what must they be to the heart? One sees the officers of death lay their hands on one that was beloved; and in the midst of their funereal chantings they take away from you the body, that we should try to bring back to us by cries of mourning. Every knell of the bell announces their approach towards the grave; and then the

silence, more horrible still, tells us that it is gone from us for ever. No, when these misfortunes come we cannot bear them. Ah! sovereign gift of Providence, happiness to be able to die, may you allay all my fears. When my wandering heart pictures to itself such horrible misfortunes, where can I fly, and remain immortal? How can I escape from the terror? But the soft thought of my death will take away from that which is dear to me a portion of its horror. But yet, when the moment of separation has come, and I am about to die, just that moment in which I shall learn the death of one I am fond of, that instant in which I survive will be to me too full of torment. I have bound up my life in those who, in all probability, have fewer years to run. Oh! my God, listen to the truest note that ever came from the bottom of my heart: spare me from a misfortune which I do not wish to name; but should it ever happen to me, pardon my soul for wishing to join thee, and for struggling against that which thou hast ordained.

29th.

I am not yet dead. The soul filled with these sombre thoughts, the darkness and the silence of the night had nearly filled me with terror. I am not astonished that we do not wish to sleep in a room in which any one has just died. I should not be hindered by pusillanimous ideas, but the imagination strongly riveted upon one thought gives rise to visions, or at least suspends momentarily that fine gift of Providence—thoughtlessness of death. By a mark of Divine beneficence, men who think about what may happen a thousand years hence, whose mind combines every probable circumstance, and every one that is possible, do not think of death; one sees, by the profound impression that general objects have upon them, that these things recall to them, so to say, or else strengthen in their minds, a thought which at first was inconceivable and incredible.

Yesterday evening there was a fearful storm heard; the workings of nature have a great effect upon the soul, all the efforts and all the art of man do not disturb it so powerfully. Nature

was made for man, and the analogy makes itself felt by the emotion that it rouses within him. I was alone. I heard only the noise of the storm, that of the inhabitants of the earth had ceased; a melancholy calm took possession of my shattered heart. I heard the rain fall in torrents; at every instant the thunder implanted in my heart the idea of the power of God, and of the danger to which I was exposed. A feeling of confidence turned my thoughts towards heaven; and to further reassure myself I thought of everything that could make me indifferent as to the loss of life—fatal enumeration when death does not follow! I was resigned, but, as my courage can only take refuge in fixed ideas, although I was firm I was bathed in tears. The connection between the smallpox and these wandering ideas that came to me during the storm—this mode of death filled me with horror. We must drive from us those that we are fond of, we must refuse to ourselves the charm of death, and the happiness of showing to them the last marks of affection which this fatal moment renders so solemn and so touching. We must not speak to them in this moment when everything that we say bears upon it such a strong stamp of truth. Ah! this moment when we see them, when we know that we shall see them no more, seems to call back again all the enjoyments of life. And what misfortune, if your mind was troubled by illness, would bring back to you any one other than yourself? What! we should look upon with coldness one that we worship; in spite of himself, in his thought sometimes your image and insensibility will join themselves together. I know it is frightful, and shows weakness, to revive any impression from those dying; but the heart-breaking of grief is caused by the recollection of the last farewell; and where is the heart that will spare itself the regrets of that which is to it the most dear? We try to console all our other friends, but can we desire to be less loved by one of whom we are passionately fond?

I hate that awful malady, for it disfigures one. We can no longer on that face impress our thoughts, fix our weary eyes on that which we have loved most, rekindle them with the

fire of that soul, or preserve the expression of affection amidst all the anguish of death. When words fail we can no longer express by our looks, and when the eyes are closed place upon our heart the hand of one that we have loved to let it feel the last remaining throbs. How horrible it would be, on the point of death, to feel that we were communicating to some beloved one the poison that is killing us! We wish that he should mourn, but he lives. We do not die when we leave upon this earth the object of our affection. This is escaping from annihilation; and even in our last moments the perspective of the death of one who is dear to us still preserves all its horror.

Not long after the time when Germaine Necker showed in such a strong manner the affection she bore to her father her marriage contract was concluded with the Baron de Staël Holstein, the Swedish ambassador in Paris. I need not now refer to the long negotiations that took place before the marriage ceremony; M. Geffroy, in his work on Gustavus III. and the Court of France, has entered into such long details respecting these negotiations, that, thanks to him, all the particulars are now fully known. But I cannot help thinking that M. Geffroy has been somewhat unjust towards M. and Mme. Necker. He wonders and becomes indignant because when M. de Staël, then only an attaché at the Swedish legation, first made overtures for the hand of Mlle. Necker, her father should have refused to listen to them until Gustavus III. had given him an assurance that he would nominate M. de Staël as ambassador in

Paris. M. and Mme. Necker may have already made up their minds to give their cherished and only daughter to a foreigner, but still it seems natural enough that they should have so laid their plans that she should have her home not far away from them; and that, when they were directly informed of the great political interest that Gustavus III. felt in this marriage, they petitioned the king, as a proof of this interest, to grant to M. de Staël the rank of ambassador (for he was already performing the functions of this office), they were also enhancing the prospects in life of the young married people, and were at the same time providing for themselves a guarantee that their daughter should remain in France. M. Geffroy also wonders that Gustavus III. should have consented to appoint M. de Staël ambassador *for life*, or else to pay him an indemnity of 25,000 francs per annum. On this point M. Geffroy would have been right if his allegations were strictly accurate, but matters were not arranged quite in the way that he has related them upon the faith of a letter of Mme. de Boufflers, a correspondent of Gustavus III. who served as intermediary in the whole affair. I have now before me a more certain document, the marriage contract, signed in the presence of Maîtres Duclos et Mony, notaries belonging to the Châtelet in Paris, between "très haut

et très puissant Seigneur, Son Excellence Eric Magnus Staël de Holstein, Chevalier de Holstein, Chevalier de l'Ordre de l'Epée, Chamberlain of her Majesty the Queen of Sweden, and Ambassador Extraordinary of his Majesty the King of Sweden, replacing his most Christian Majesty, living in Paris, Rue du Bacq, Faubourg Saint Germain, in the parish of Saint Sulpice, of the one part, and Messire Jacques Necker, late director of finance, noble Baron de Coppet, Seigneur de Bière, Bérole, and other places, member of the Council of Sixty in the Republic of Geneva,[1] and noble Dame Louise Curchodi de Nasse, his wife, stipulating for themselves and in their names and for Anne Louise Germaine Necker, spinster under age, their daughter, with her consent to these presents, living with the said gentleman and lady her father and mother, Rue Bergère in the parish of Saint Eustache, of the other part." This contract, which bears the signature of Louis XVI., of Marie Antoinette, and all the princes belonging to the royal family, contains under Article Two the following clause:—

In consideration of the said marriage, his Majesty, the King of Sweden has graciously assured to his Excellence, my said future husband, as he has willed, that is to say:—

[1] It was in 1774 that M. Necker had been called upon to belong to that which at Geneva was known by the title of the Council of Sixty. This was a sort of intermediary diplomatic council between the Magnificent Little Council and the Council of the Two Hundred.

Firstly, the enjoyment of the title and emoluments during six years above and beyond the first six years, the course of which has already begun,[1] of the said position of ambassador extraordinary, replacing his most Christian Majesty without prejudice to further prolongation, if his Majesty the King of Sweden continues to be content with his services.

Secondly, a pension of twenty thousand livres tournois de France, payable in any country to his said Excellence, my said future husband, from the time he shall cease to hold the position of ambassador extraordinary for his most Christian Majesty.

It was, therefore, not *for life* but for twelve years that Gustavus III. bound himself to assure to M. de Staël the position of ambassador. Now if we reflect that at this time it was usually customary for courts of secondary importance to change but seldom their ambassadors, and that in particular the Comte de Creütz, the immediate predecessor of M. de Staël, had been accredited at Versailles for more than twenty years, the engagement entered into by Gustavus III. for twelve years will appear to be less singular and one less difficult to carry out than if it had been contracted during our own times. And the same may be said of the pension of twenty thousand livres tournois, promised in case M. de Staël should be replaced in his appointment. From this marriage contract we learn that M. Necker had given

[1] According to Swedish customs ambassadors were appointed, not for any undetermined period, but for six years. Therefore we see this clause, that at first seems to us to be strange: "during six years above and beyond the first six years, the course of which has already begun."

to his daughter a marriage portion of six hundred and fifty thousand livres, whereas the emoluments M. de Staël received from his position as ambassador constituted very much the largest portion of his income. A pension payable out of the royal purse (whether made by the King of Sweden or by the King of France) was then a frequent, and always considered as an honourable, source of fortune, and I do not understand why the paternal prudence of M. Necker in endeavouring to compensate for the inequality that existed between his daughter and his son-in-law should be judged to be reprehensible.

As regards the inclination of the two people, one for the other, which according to M. Geffroy was not sufficiently consulted, this consideration, doubtless a most important one, does not appear to have been less thought of in the marriage of M. de Staël and Mlle. Necker than in other marriages of that day;—and are we quite sure either that in marriages of our own time this consideration is allowed to outweigh all others? We may recollect also that M. de Staël had been very successful at the French Court, that he was considered to be a man of good intellect and of pleasing manners. So much may be gathered from a portrait of him still at Coppet, where he is represented in a powdered wig and a black velvet coat with red facings, wearing

by his side in his sword-belt the chamberlain's key of the Queen of Sweden. M. and Mme. Necker's friends were unanimous in their congratulations on the brilliant marriage of their daughter, and in the midst of this general approbation Marmontel flattered himself that he was the first to point out to Mme. Necker the advantages to be derived from such a union.

The marriage was celebrated on Saturday, the 14th of January, 1786, in the chapel of the Swedish embassy. As was then customary Mme. de Staël spent the first few days after her marriage under her parents' roof. But on Thursday in the following week she left the house in which she had spent the days of her youth to go and live in the Rue du Bac, where the Swedish embassy was situated. Just before leaving she wrote to her mother a farewell letter, which may show, if further proof be necessary, that not on the side of the daughter, any more than on that of the mother, did those dissensions of which I have already spoken destroy the affection they bore one to the other.

MY DEAR MAMMA,

I will come back to you again this evening. This is the last day that I shall live as I have done hitherto throughout all my life. What does it cost me to make such a change! I do not know if there is another mode of existence; I have never felt any others, and that which is unknown to me adds to my trouble. Ah! I know it. Perhaps I have at times wronged you, mamma. At this moment, as at the moment of death, all

my actions come before me, and I fear not to open my soul before you as I feel I wish to do. But pray believe that the phantoms of the imagination have often fascinated my eyes, and that often also they have come between you and me, and have made me different from what I am. But I feel now the depth of my affection, and that it has always been the same for you. It is a part of my life; I am altogether shaken and deranged at the very moment I am going to leave you. I will come back to-morrow morning, but this night I shall sleep under another roof. I shall not have in my house the angel that made it proof against thunder or fire. I shall not have her who would protect me if I was on the point of death, who would cover me before God with the rays of her bright soul. I shall hear at each moment news of your health; I feel beforehand the sorrow of every minute. I will not tell you, mamma, to what extent my affection for you adds to the strength of my heart. Yours is so pure that all the sentiments addressed to it must first pass through heaven. I lift them up to God. I pray to him ardently that he may terminate our sufferings; I ask him that I may be worthy of you. Happiness will come afterwards; will come at intervals; may come never. The close of life ends everything; and you are so sure that there is another life—so sure of it, that my heart cannot doubt.

I will not finish. I have a sentiment that would make me write all my life. Accept, mamma, my dear mamma, my deep respect and my boundless affection.

Thursday morning—still in your house.

Mme. de Staël's marriage added a new brilliancy to her parent's drawing-room. Instead of taking too large a share in the conversation that went on while she was present, she was always ready to run behind her father's chair when she had attracted attention by a smart reply, but by degrees she became acknowledged

as queen of the drawing-room, and it was she who gave the tone to what was there said and done. This was the time when that party of men whom we should nowadays call the Liberal Opposition, used to meet nearly every day at M. Necker's house, and when his wife's drawing-room, which at first had been purely literary, was in a fair way to become nearly exclusively political. But in order to indicate how this change had come to pass, I must go back again a few years, and give some details as to the life and career of M. Necker, whom I have up to the present moment purposely left somewhat in the background.

CHAPTER IV.

M. NECKER'S FIRST TERM OF OFFICE LIFE.

FEW men have known so strongly as M. Necker, in a career relatively short, the alternatives of enjoying the public favour and of unpopularity. "M. Necker felt," as Baron de Gleichen[1] says in his *Souvenirs*, that which has always "happened to those who remain moderate among those who are madly excited." And in the first rank of these madly excited people, and even before the pamphleteers of the Revolution, must be placed all those who were closely connected with what was then termed the Court party. In the opinion of Fersen,[2] of

[1] Charles Henri de Gleichen was born in 1735 at Nemersdorf, near to Bayreuth. At first he was chamberlain to the Margrave of Bayreuth, and afterwards joined the Danish service. In 1763 he was appointed by the King of Denmark as Envoy Extraordinary at the Court of Versailles, and in this quality he remained for several years in Paris, where he became intimately acquainted with the Choiseuls and the Neckers. He died at Ratisbon in 1807. The *Souvenirs* of Baron Gleichen were published in France, by M. Paul Grimblot, in the year 1868.

[2] Jean Axel, Comte de Fersen, born on the 4th September, 1755, was the son of the field-marshal Frédéric Axel de Fersen and Hedwige,

Weber,[1] of the Marquis de Ferrières,[2] of the anonymous author of *Paris, Versailles, et les provinces au dix-huitième siècle*,[3] M. Necker was a traitor, or at least an ambitious man who let loose upon France all the evils of the Revolution to satisfy his own appetite for gaining power. Bertrand de Molleville[4] thinks it necessary to clear himself from being accused of partiality before he says, "that to M. Necker we must unhesitatingly attribute all the misfortunes of the Revolution; but that it is to his vanity and to his folly, not to his evil disposition,

Comtesse de la Gardie. He acquired great honour on account of his devotedness to Marie Antoinette. He was massacred by the populace at Stockholm on the 20th June, 1810. His *Memoirs*, of which the most interesting portion has unfortunately been destroyed, were published by his grand-nephew, the Baron de Klinckowstrom. Paris: 2 vols. 1877.

[1] Joseph Weber was the foster-brother of Marie Antoinette. His *Memoirs* were published in London in 1804.

[2] Charles Élie, Marquis de Ferrières, born at Poitiers in 1741, died in 1804, belonged to the *partie droite* in the Constituent Assembly. His *Memoirs*, which first appeared in the year VII., have been reprinted in the collection of *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution française*.

[3] *Paris, Versailles, et les Provinces au XVIII^e Siècle, par un ancien officier aux gardes françaises*, is the work of Dugast de Bois Saint Just. This collection of slanderous stories (and of which the authenticity is doubtful) against all those who took part in the great Revolution, appeared in Paris in 1809.

[4] Antoine François, Marquis Bertrand de Molleville, born at Toulouse in 1714, was appointed Ministre de la Marine in 1791. He emigrated to England, and did not return to France until 1804. He died four years afterwards, leaving, besides the two volumes of Mémoirs, a *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, and a *Histoire d'Angleterre*.

that they must be placed." But of the competitors for abusive language the palm must be given to Sénac de Meilhan,[1] the old intendant of the Hainaut, to whose merit we have at last paid some tardy recognition, but who in his lifetime endeavoured ineffectually to gain a place in the Ministry and also a seat in the Academy. We may partly judge of the man by the way in which he has spoken of the personal appearance of M. Necker, whose physiognomy, perhaps rather heavy, his fine and hesitating expression, are already well known. The writer says, "His face offers to the eye of an observer a mixture of atrocity, of disdain, of bewilderment, of scoffing, of depth, and of insensibility." Elsewhere in his writings he introduces a discussion between three emigrants as to the punishment that ought to be inflicted upon M. Necker. One interlocutor declares that he ought to be burnt alive, another that he ought to be quartered, and the third that his hands ought to be cut and boiling lead poured into the wounds.

[1] Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan, born in Paris in 1736, was the son o Sénac, first physician to Louis XV. He was successively intendant of Provence and of the Hainaut; but he is more especially known as author of the pseudo-Memoirs of Anne de Gonzague, Princesse Palatine, and of sundry other works. He emigrated at the commencement of the Revolution, and, after having passed several years in Russia, died at Vienna in 1803. His work on *Le Gouvernement, les mœurs, et les conditions en France avant la Révolution*, followed by *Portraits des personnages distingués de la fin du XVIII^e Siècle*, was reprinted in 1882 by M. de Lescure.

During the last thirty years much labour has been expended in endeavouring to explain the condition of the old state of society in France, and also its decomposition; and we can now see plainly enough that to account for this old state of society, calumniated though it has been in certain respects, it is no longer permitted to us to try and accumulate against one person the whole burden of the responsibility. But if the language of those historians who belong to what may be termed the Royalist school has become softened as against M. Necker, I would not undertake to say that their innermost thoughts have become altogether changed. Not very long since, one of the most clever and brilliant writers of this school, M. le Comte de Ludre, in an ingenious study[1] upon the causes of the Revolution, spoke openly of the vices of M. Necker and of his repellent aspect, as though he had been writing of Mirabeau or of Danton. On the other hand, those moderate men who belonged to the same party as M. Necker himself have defended him, as moderate-minded men do generally defend each other, by trying to throw upon him the responsibility for those same faults which were brought against themselves. We should never have had an apology offered for M. Necker if Mme. de Staël,

[1] This study appeared in the pages of a monthly magazine entitled *Le Correspondant*. We should be glad if this and other works by the same author had been afterwards reunited into a volume.

in her *Considérations sur la Révolution Française*, and the Baron Auguste de Staël,[1] in the notice which he prefixed to an edition of the works written by his grandfather, had not thought it their duty to undertake the task. It may be that the daughter's enthusiasm and the reverence felt by the grandson somewhat influenced them in their judgments. And notwithstanding the many years that have since passed and gone have certainly relieved my judgment from some of the fetters, I shall not attempt to re-write this apology; such a design would be altogether foreign to my present purpose, which is rather to give a picture of what took place in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. I will confine myself to showing, during the time he was in office, the position he occupied in that society in which he lived, and from the innumerable documents before me I will choose some few specimens that will describe the general conditions of society immediately before the great outbreak. Perhaps these pages may cause some interest to be felt for a man who, take him all in all, in an age of folly was accounted as one of the wisest, in an age of crime was accounted as one of the most pure, and

[1] In 1820 the Baron de Staël Holstein published an edition of the complete works of M. Necker, with a conscientious introductory preface on his financial administration. And Mme. de Staël also published a study on the private life of M. Necker, which does not appear in all the complete editions of his works.

who more than any one else was the victim of a very great misfortune: that of finding himself confronted with a task which would not improbably have been too great even for the genius of a Bonaparte.

The first situation held by M. Necker was that of Minister for the Republic of Geneva in Paris. This appointment, made by his fellow-citizens, which gave him access to the court, contributed more than has been generally believed to his rise in political life. Great as may have been the success of his *Éloge de Colbert*, to which the French Academy had awarded a prize, and also of his *Essai sur le commerce des grains*, which excited so much anger among the partisans of Turgot, the old Maurepas would not have gone to seek out M. Necker in his office in the Rue de Cléry, to submit the choice of his name to Louis XVI. if he had not first met him at Versailles. The Minister of the Republic of Geneva used often to hold consultations with the ministers of the King, and these occasions gave to M. Necker the opportunity of making the acquaintance of men whom he afterwards met as his colleagues, as his adversaries, or as his friends. I will dwell for a few moments on this commencement of his career; it is but little known, and may at the same time give us some insight into the diplomatic secrets of a small republic in the eighteenth century.

The Republic of Geneva had always led a somewhat precarious existence, bound in as it was by the territory of its ambitious neighbour the Duke of Savoy, and that of its powerful neighbour the King of France.[1] To these difficulties which came from outside they themselves added others by the intensity of the wranglings that took place between the *bourgeois* and the *natifs*, between the *négatifs* and the *représentants*.[2] These quarrels had already caused blood to flow in the streets, and people were afraid that under colour of maintaining order, France might intervene and place her soldiers upon Genevese territory, which she had once already blockaded with a band of her troops. It

[1] It will be remembered that since the Reformation Geneva was a separate and independent republic, and did not form part of the Helvetic Confederation. It was not until the treaties passed in 1815 that it became annexed to Switzerland. A statue, somewhat massive in appearance, erected on the banks of the Rhone, near to the English Garden, commemorates the annexation.

[2] In the political language peculiar to Geneva the *bourgeois* were those who, by virtue of their birth, became invested with the exclusive right of participating in the government of the republic, and *natifs* those who, born in the country of foreign parents, were, on the contrary, excluded from this right, and even were debarred from certain professions; the *représentants* were those who had addressed petitions to the Magnificent Little Council after the condemnation of *Émile;* and the *négatifs* were those who contested the legality of these petitions. The Magnificent Little Council, an outcome from the Council of the Two Hundred, was composed of the syndics and of an indeterminate number of bourgeois. It was a body at once political, administrative, and judicial, which exercised nearly all the powers in the Republic.

was known that the Duc de Choiseul[1] was ill-disposed towards the Republic, and the almost ludicrous attempt he had made to make of the little village Versoix,[2] situated on the banks of the lake of Geneva, a commercial port denoted intentions on his part that were far from friendly. While all this was going on, the representative of the Republic of Geneva at the Court of France died, and the Magnificent Little Council thought that in such delicate circumstances they could not make a better choice than to select a man who for some years past lived with some prestige in a large house in Paris, and who would be able to represent the Republic and give to it a certain dignity. After they had made themselves acquainted with M. Necker's views on the matter, and had got an answer favourable to their desires, the Magnificent Little Council hastened

[1] Etienne François, Duc de Choiseul, first known as Comte de Stainville, was born in 1719, and died in 1785. He was minister, without once going out of office, from 1758 to 1770.

[2] The territory of Versoix, which now belongs to the Canton of Geneva, formed then a part of France. It was in reference to this attempt made by the Duc de Choiseul that Voltaire composed and sent the following verses to the Duchess :—

Envoyez-nous des Amphions,
Ou vos peines seront perdues.
A Versoix nous avons des rues
Mais nous n'avons pas de maisons.

We may still see in the lake the ruins of those foundations laid by the Duc de Choiseul; he had intended that the port should be known by the name of Port Pompadour.

to notify to him his nomination by a letter couched in a pompous and monarchical style, as was always customary with the official communications of the Republic:—

MOST DEAR AND TRUSTY,

The zeal which we know you bear to the country allows us to hope that you will accept the position of our minister at the Court of France to which we have appointed you. We have seen with peculiar satisfaction by your letter of the 23rd day of this month that your ideas accurately correspond with the opinion we have of you. We show you this mark of our favour with the more pleasure because by your ability you have already deserved most flattering signs of the approbation of his Majesty. . . . We do not doubt that, following the example of those generous citizens who have so usefully served the Republic in the position you are about to occupy, you will neglect nothing to maintain towards us the goodwill of the King, which has been to us so precious and so honourable that it is the principal object we keep in view in having a minister at his court. We are persuaded that we are placing the interests of the country into very good hands.

We therefore pray God, most dear and trusty, that he may have you in his holy keeping.

The Syndics and Council of Geneva,

LULLIN.[1]

31*st August*, 1768.

To this letter M. Necker answered by testifying to the "Magnificent and most honoured signiors, members

[1] The Lullin family, says Galiffe in his *Notices Généalogiques*, is, of all the present existing families, the most old-established in Geneva. He who signed this letter was Michel Lullin de Chateauvieux, born in 1699, and who died in 1781, one of the many syndics given by this same family to the Republic of Geneva.

of the Little Council," his sensibility of the honour done to him, and by praying for indulgence "for his talents." A few days afterwards he gave a report to the Council of his presentation to the King, and he made his first appearance at Versailles.

M. Necker had occasion to render to the little Republic that he represented some important services, among others obtaining for them the re-establishment of free trade in corn between the territory of Geneva and that of France (which in the time of famine was not a matter of small interest), and also in giving occasionally to the Magnificent and most honoured Councillors of the Little Council a few words of good advice. When he represented to them that two thousand *natifs* exasperated by the rigour of the *bourgeois* had asked of the Duc de Choiseul the permission to establish themselves at Versoix, he added: "It would be unfortunate and not altogether to our honour that Protestants should prefer the domination they seem to wish for to that of a Republic." Perpetually worried by them to bring to the notice of the Duc de Choiseul the most insignificant details relating to the Republic of Geneva, and not being able to make them understand "that it was not reasonable to expect M. le Duc de Choiseul to give much time to matters that concerned him very little," M. Necker at last excused himself in vague terms,

"because of his important business and the state of his health, which did not allow him to devote himself with as much zeal as he would have wished to the affairs of the Republic." The Magnificent Little Council felt themselves to be worsted, but as it was a great decision for them to make to recall a representative who was well received at Versailles, they decided upon a middle course, which we must allow was a little singular. "After the prayer," says the book of its proceedings kept by the Council, "M. le Premier (the chief syndic who presided over the Little Council) said that the health of the Sieur Necker, is altered so that he cannot concern himself with the business with which he is entrusted in such a manner as to satisfy himself. It was decided that some one should be sent to Paris to give solace to the Sieur Necker, with letters of credit unqualified, and that, considering the nature of the mission, it was not necessary to give him previous warning." At a later sitting the Council decided that one of its members, noble Philibert Cramer, should be charged with the mission.[1]

He who accepted this delicate mission of attempting without letters of recommendation to replace the Minister of Geneva in Paris was however a man of

[1] Philibert Cramer was born in 1727; he had been appointed member of the Magnificent Little Council in 1767. He afterwards held the post of Treasurer-General, and died in 1779.

intelligence. Philibert Cramer was the brother of that Gabriel Cramer, Voltaire's bookseller, whom Voltaire sometimes called handsome Cramer, sometimes *marquis;* but Philibert he used to call *le prince.* Our Cramer was a distinguished looking man, though slightly deformed; he had a taste for literature, he knew the ways of the world, and he also knew Paris. But, prompted by ambition, he thought he could accept an irregular mission, in which, as we shall see, he was altogether discomfited. In spite of the fact that severe penalties were imposed upon any one of the councillors who should betray the secrets of the Magnificent Little Council, the departure of such an important personage as noble Philibert Cramer could not be resolved and prepared without the news being spread more or less about the town. The French minister Hennin[1] heard of it, and he told the Duc de Choiseul, who in turn wrote to M. Necker a letter, in the following words:—

I send you, and I entrust to your care, a letter[2] which I have just received from Geneva, and which I do not understand. But I beg you to let them know in that town that any one other than you would be very disagreeable, and that as a natural

[1] Hennin, born in 1730, had first been a French resident in Poland. He was one of the secret diplomatic agents of Louis XV. He died in 1807.

[2] This and the following letters are taken from the archives in Geneva, which were most liberally opened to me.

consequence I should not receive him. You know of my friendship for you. Send me back M. Hennin's letter.

P.S.—La Borde[1] and La Balue are delighted with you. How many thanks do I not owe to you.

The Republic of Geneva was not altogether successful, as we may perceive, in this indirect attempt they made to supplant M. Necker. He had just advanced 1,300,000 livres to the Court bankers, and this was not the first service of the same kind that he had rendered. Forewarned and forearmed, M. Necker waited philosophically for the arrival of his unknown successor. When the new comer arrived in Paris he found himself considerably embarrassed; he wished to gain access to the Duc de Choiseul, but knew not how to obtain it. Let us see how noble Philibert Cramer, in a letter addressed to the Magnificent Little Council, describes the awkwardness of his own situation :—

The Council will understand my difficulty when they read this letter. Obliged, however, to come to some decision, I thought that it would be indelicate and also dangerous to expose a member of the Council to the risk of being badly received, and I assure you that this was very far from what I anticipated. M. Necker is in admirable health, he is big, fat, and merry-hearted, and if we had first seen his picture I should never have come away.

P.S.—That which interests me most in all this is to escape

[1] Jean Joseph de la Borde, born at Jaca in Spain, partly owed his appointment as banker at the court through the interest of the Duc de Choiseul.

being made ridiculous, and I also particularly desire that letters are not addressed to me from Geneva under the title of Minister of the Republic. In my present position it would only be a nickname.

To avoid all ridicule was, indeed, a difficult matter, and in this noble Philibert Cramer was not altogether successful. As he did not know what course he had best take, M. Necker gave him his assistance, and advised him, with perhaps ironical courtesy, to present himself to the Duc de Choiseul as a member of the Magnificent Little Council of the Republic of Geneva. "M. Necker advised me," Cramer wrote, "to present myself to the Duc de Choiseul as a magistrate of Geneva, but considering what has taken place, I do not think such a course would be expedient; and if I cannot find access to him by some other means, I had better refrain altogether."

No doubt because he could not find other means, and also because he did not wish to go to M. Necker a second time, Cramer determined to write to the Duc de Choiseul himself, to solicit the favour of an audience; but whether in doing so he expressed himself clumsily, or whether the Duc de Choiseul was annoyed at the persistence shown, a second refusal was given by the minister, in terms so disobliging that Cramer thought he had best return to Geneva, not however without protesting against the wrong done, in his

opinion, to his own dignity, and also to that of the Magnificent Little Council itself. M. Necker was obliged again to interfere to prevent the quarrel from becoming too fierce. He wrote to the Council:—

M. Cramer went away last Monday. He was unwilling that I should present him to M. de Choiseul as a member of the Council. I would have again advised this course if he had not written a letter which made it impossible. He will receive from the Duke no reply, so the Duke assured me yesterday. I omit a few observations the Duke made to me on this matter as they are now useless. I asked him if, in the letter he wrote to M. Cramer, he had any wish to offend the Council or the Republic, and he assured me that he had not. I was fully persuaded he had no such intention, and that everything ought to be attributed to the motive of which I have already spoken to you.

The Magnificent Little Council had therefore nothing else to do than to gloss over as well as they could the fact of Cramer's retreat. They wrote to M. Necker, "acknowledging the receipt of his letter, congratulating him upon the improvement in his health, and expressed to him the sentiments of the Council as to the satisfaction he had given them by his services, and that they had no other reasons for sending M. Cramer to Paris than that which he himself had indicated, to obtain from him news as to the state of M. Necker's health." In this diplomatic imbroglio, from which poor Cramer feared that he could not escape without bringing back

with him a nickname (as a matter of fact he did not escape, for he was spoken of as *sent out of France*), M. Necker gave proof of greater address in the management of men than he afterwards showed under different circumstances. The victory remained wholly upon his side, and many years later he confessed that, of all the reminiscences in his public career, this first passage at arms was to him the most agreeable.

A few years afterwards M. Necker saw the Duc de Choiseul succumb to the cabal of Mme. du Barry, and he thus first became acquainted with some of the intrigues going on at court, of which as time went on he came to have a more intimate knowledge. His diplomatic situation did not allow him to join those who went to visit the deposed minister in his glorious exile at Chanteloup, but he long remained with the Duc and Duchesse de Choiseul on terms of good friendship. I will a little anticipate the historical order of events by inserting here two letters written by the kind-hearted Duchess whom we have in our imagination invested with all the graces belonging to the old aristocracy, forgetting however that she was the grand-daughter of a big financier. The first of these letters is only a short note, but pleasantly written, in which she thanks M. Necker for having sent to her his *Compte rendu*:—

Monday.

I have read, monsieur, your report, and what is more extraordinary, I think I have understood it. Since I imagine I have understood it, you think that I must have been charmed by it, and you must know that I am extremely obliged to you, both for the pleasure that it gave me and also for the mark of your consideration in sending it to me.

But you are a flatterer in all the good things you say of the nation. I do not doubt that this flattery of yours has been successful to you with her, for it has been so most completely with me. I think also that one of your notes is a bit of gentle praise meant for M. de Choiseul.

A few months after the publication of this report M. Necker fell suddenly into disfavour. As soon as the news of his retirement reached Chanteloup, the Duchesse de Choiseul at once wrote to him to express her sorrow :—

CHANTELOUP, 22*nd May*, 1781.

It is all over, sir, you are going away from us—you carry with you your honour, you leave us the regret. You have done us much good and you would have done still more. Your retirement fills us with great anxiety, and our evil forebodings may perhaps come to pass. If your retirement was hastily considered would the glory you have gained console you for the evil to which you have exposed us? I cannot think it, and I desire your welfare. I am very sad because I am losing all hope. How can we take an interest in the prosperity that cannot come to pass?

You had made me hope, sir, before I went away, that if the misfortune I dreaded did actually happen you would come here to console me by your presence. I had begged you to engage Mme. Necker to do me the same honour. The discretion which then prevented me from making her acquaintance no longer exists; and

both of you should now drag yourselves away from those importunities to which your fame exposes you. You will find here no one but friends; you will have peace, repose, and freedom. You may then speak openly of what you have done, and you need have no fear of any one who hears what you may say. If I am not so fortunate as to persuadè you and Mme. Necker to come to us before M. de Choiseul goes away, he will then go to you, and will insist that both of you should come here. As long as it may be possible I will hope for his success, and I dèserve to win it because of sentiments with which I have the honour to be, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

LA DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL.

These few deep and simple words, "I am very sad because I am losing all hope," express very accurately the peculiar nature of the regret felt by the Duchesse de Choiseul upon M. Necker's retirement. It had long been believed at court that M. Necker belonged to what was called the Choiseul party, and the Duchess may perhaps have hoped that after the death of the old Maurepas, he would help to bring her husband back again into power. It was over the loss of this last hope that the Duchess was mourning, quite as much as she was deploring, the fall of M. Necker. Necker and Choiseul! Two names that history has not brought together, and which our imagination even has some difficulty in associating. Who can say, however, that if the manners and the dexterity of the one were joined to the financial ability of the other, that their united efforts would not have been sufficient to guard the

monarchy from that fearful crash against the rock on to which it was cast.

We have seen how the Duc de Choiseul thanked M. Necker for the financial services he rendered to the State. Those services were frequent; and M. Necker's correspondence with the officers of the royal Treasury [1] shows us into what incredible disorder the public finances had fallen at the end of the reign of Louis XV. These officers of a shamefully managed treasury urged M. Necker every day to come to their assistance. All their hope was in him. They appealed to his love for the reputation of the Treasury, and upon that love, at certain moments, depended the departure of the King's household for Fontainebleau. We must recollect, too, that these supplications were addressed to a Protestant banker, who was chosen to represent a foreign government at the court of France, before we can fully appreciate the necessity of a reform, at least in the administration of finances. But whatever may have been the services rendered by M. Necker, and his reputation for ability in certain quarters, his name was not very widely known until a fortunate circumstance occurred which brought him prominently before the

[1] The *gardes du Trésor royal*, or trésoriers de l'épargne, date as far back as François I. They were three in number, and alternately they fulfilled the functions of their office. They had a deliberative voice in the Council of State and in the direction of the finances.

eye of the public. His political rise was somewhat peculiar, and his adversaries therefore have not been slow to impute to him motives of intrigue. Sénac de Meilhan first put into circulation an anecdote which was repeated by M. Droz in his solid *Histoire de Louis XVI.*, and which was again told by MM. de Goncourt in one of those numerous works where we find ready wit in place of sound examination of facts, and an easy style of writing in place of patient research into documents. According to Sénac de Meilhan the real author of M. Necker's prosperity was a sort of chevalier of fortune, whom we often find mentioned in the memoirs of the time, and who instead of calling himself by his real name, Masson de Pezai, prevailed upon people to give him the title of the Marquis de Pezai.[1] This pseudo Marquis de Pezai was a man always reduced to some shift or some expedient. He used to rhyme poor verses, and a quatrain was composed upon him to the effect that he had triumphed over nature and had created himself both poet and marquis. But still by his manners and good address he had made for himself a position in the world. It

[1] Alexander Jacques Frédéric Masson, Marquis de Pezai, was born in 1741, and died in 1777. His works have been collected under the title, *Œuvres agréables et morales, ou Variétés littéraires.* His sister was an intriguing woman, Mme. Cassini, whom Louis XV. would not admit to court, but who nevertheless contributed not a little towards making her brother's fortune.

was of him that M. de Maurepas said wittily: "M. de Pezai is master of France;" and when he was asked the reason why, he answered: "M. de Pezai governs la Princesse de Montbarrey, for he is her lover; Mme. de Montbarrey governs my wife; my wife governs me, and I—do I not govern France?"[1] If we are to believe Sénac de Meilhan it was this not very meritorious personage who first attracted the attention of the chief minister of Louis XVI. towards the Genevese banker; it was he who had been charged by M. Necker to place before the King, whose good graces he had managed to win, a minute upon the state of the finances of the country; and it was he who by his persistency triumphed over the doubts of the King and of Maurepas when it became a question of providing a successor to M. de Clugny in the office of the General Control.[2] Sénac de Meilhan tells us: "More than once the proud M. Necker has come enveloped

[1] La Princesse de Montbarrey, *née* Noailles, was the wife of Alexandre Marie Léonor de Saint Maurice, Prince de Montbarrey. He was born in 1732 and died in 1796, and was Minister of War from 1777 to 1780. The frivolous Maurepas had at any rate the merit of keeping to his wife, who was a sister of the Duc de Vrillière, a fidelity that was uncommon among the husbands of the 18th century.

[2] Ogier Clugny, maître des requêtes in the Conseil d'État, had been appointed as successor to Turgot. *Four months of pillage*,—such was the qualification by which his short term of office was known. His dismissal had already been decided, when he died, in the month of October, 1776.

in his driving-coat to wait inside the coach-house in his cabriolet for the moment when M. de Pezai was expected back from Versailles." Unfortunately no document has been adduced by Sénac de Meilhan in support of his statement, and the documents in the archives at Coppet do not confirm it. There are in these archives many letters written by Pezai (for he wrote to everybody) to M. and to Mme. Necker. But in no one of these letters is there the slightest allusion to any service rendered by him to M. Necker; and his letters to Mme. Necker congratulating her upon her husband's promotion are as insignificant as all the others. Pezai was not a man to forget a good service that he had done to any one, and if M. Necker had been under so many obligations to him he would not have been able to refuse to appoint him—as was afterwards actually the case—to the direction of the Roads and Bridges, an office recently vacated by M. de Trudaine.[1]

To understand the reasons for M. Necker's rise to power we must therefore look for them in the natural order of things; that is to say, in the high esteem which his talents

[1] Trudaine de Montigny, born at Clerment in 1777, was the son of Daniel Charles Trudaine, Director of the Roads and Bridges. He had succeeded to his father's office. His name of Montigny came to him from the small village of Montigny Lencoup, in the Department of Seine-et-Marne, where he owned a magnificent castle, and which was visited by André Chénier, but which has since been destroyed.

had placed him, and in the close relation which his diplomatic functions had brought about between him and Maurepas. "Two conversations with M. de Maurepas," says Mme. de Staël in her notice on the home life of her father, "proved sufficient to determine him to propose M. Necker as director of the royal treasury." Mme. de Staël says two conversations, but she might in fact have added something more. M. Necker also wrote to Maurepas a long letter which is now preserved in the national archives. In this letter, written at the time when the King was hesitating whether he would accept the candidate offered to him by Maurepas, M. Necker shows to his protector with much frankness his desire to endeavour in common with him to set again into order the finances of the country. After first thanking Maurepas for an affectionate letter, the remembrance of which, he says, "will be upon his heart for the rest of his life," M. Necker continues :—

I have always considered as my friends those to whom I could speak openly, and the goodwill that you show to me, monsieur le Comte, gives me every encouragement. You will like me still better when I can, in a career common with your own, show you all my sentiments and all my thoughts. Do not fear, therefore, to let me see your strength ; I give you my word of honour that you will have no cause for regret. And without this confidence, how and with what object could I seek for a place which can only have for me that interest of satisfaction which I hope to

be able to give to others, and which I am sure to deserve by my conduct, as to which the most rigorous criticism will never be able to find fault? And what can I fear for myself if this be my intention? If I can do well, people must be pleased with me; if I cannot, owing to circumstances of which I am ignorant, I shall not be embarrassed as to what to do, for I shall take myself away, and very shortly.

But there was a difficulty attaching to M. Necker's religious faith. The appointment of General Controller gave a right of entry and a deliberative voice in the Council of State.[1] Now, not fourteen years had elapsed since the parliament of Toulouse had passed judgment of death upon a Protestant minister, François Rochette, as "accused and convicted of exercising the functions of his ministry;" and he had walked towards the executioner barefooted, bareheaded, with the rope round his neck, and carrying a board upon which was written, "Minister of the so-called Reformed Religion." The Maréchal de Beauvau, appointed governor of Provence, very nearly fell into disfavour in 1769 because he set at liberty a few Protestant

[1] The Conseil d'État, one of the oldest institutions of the ancient monarchy, bore this name since the early years of the XVI[th] century; after having been called successively, *Cour du Roi*, *Conseil du Roi*, *Grand Conseil*, and *Conseil Privé*. The interior organisation which governed the Conseil d'État until the Revolution dated from a decree passed on the 16th January, 1530, and drawn up by Michel de Marillac. Whether it sat as *Conseil des Finances*, *Conseil des Dépêches*, or as *Conseil des Parties*, the most important affairs of the monarchy were brought before this body. See Chéruel, *Dictionnaire des institutions administratives*.

women who had been imprisoned in the old tower of Aigues Mortes. The last Protestants got out with difficulty from the convict prison, and those who always enjoyed their freedom were not legally allowed to marry and to consider their children as lawfully born.[1] The idea of nominating a Protestant to an important public office was therefore a great advance in the progress towards tolerance of opinions; and we must in justice so far honour the pious-minded and timorous Louis XVI. in that he conquered his own scruples in the interest of the public welfare. But it would be asking too much of him to expect that he would all at once admit M. Necker to a seat in the Council. The expedient devised was to divide the privileges of the General Control Office, and then by the side of a general controller, who should be a nobody, to place a director, who would be all-powerful. It would seem that we can now trace the hesitating steps taken by Louis XVI. before he finally signed the letters-patent appointing M. Necker as his minister. Official documents were not then as now couched in that stereotyped and invariable formal manner, concealing as far as possible all trace of the sentiment in which they were written.

[1] See as to the situation of the Protestants in France under Louis XV., De Felice, *Histoire des Protestants*. It was in reference to the execution of this Rochette that Voltaire wrote, cavalierly enough, "There has just been hanged a certain Rochette or Rochatte."

In those acts shades of thought might be observed, and it is not always unimportant to endeavour to read between the lines. The terms in which the letters-patent given to M. Necker were drawn up seem to show a wish to attenuate the importance of the functions conferred upon him, and at the same time to explain the cause for another nomination, should it be found necessary.

To-day, the 22nd of October, 1776, the King, being at Fontainebleau, having judged it convenient for the welfare of his service, in naming the Sieur Taboureau des Réaux, Councillor of State, late Intendant at Valenciennes, to fulfil the office of Controller-General of Finance, vacant by the decease of the Sieur Clugny, to reserve to himself the direction of the Royal Treasury, has thought at the same time that he could not confide such an important matter to any one more worthy of the office than the Sieur Necker. The many proofs that he has given of his zeal for the service of his Majesty, and the great knowledge he has already acquired in the administration of finance, persuade his Majesty that he will worthily respond to the confidence with which his Majesty is willing to honour him. To this effect his Majesty has named and names him to exercise under his orders the direction of his Royal Treasury, with the title of Councillor of Finance and General Director of the Royal Treasury; and for assurance of his will his Majesty has signed with his hand the present letters-patent, and has ordered them to be countersigned by me, Councillor Secretary of State of his Commandments and Finances,

Signed, LOUIS,
And undersigned, AMELOT.

This combination could not last very long. The officious Mme. de la Ferté Imbault, who knew the

Taboureau family, was over-prodigal with her good advice to Mme. Necker in recommending her to flatter Mme. Taboureau's vanity by appearing with her frequently in public. But there came a clashing of ideas and of interests, and at the end of nine months' partnership, during which time Taboureau occupied himself exclusively in looking after the emoluments of office, which had been neglected by his predecessors, he sent in his resignation. Then there came a second form of letters-patent, which determined anew the nature of the functions to be exercised by M. Necker:—

To-day, the 29th of June, 1777, the King, being at Versailles, not judging it expedient to fill up the place of Controller General of his finances left vacant by the resignation of the Sieur Taboureau des Réaux, Councillor of State, but judging it necessary to place in the hands of one person the functions relative to the administration of the finances, and wishing to give to the Sieur Necker a proof of the satisfaction which his Majesty has of his services; to this effect his Majesty has named and names him to act immediately under his orders as General Director of Finance.

M. de Vergennes,[1] the Minister for Foreign Affairs, wrote to the Magnificent Little Council: "M. Necker's

[1] Charles Granier, Comte de Vergennes, was born at Dijon in 1717, and died in 1787. After he had filled several important diplomatic posts, among others that of ambassador at the Court of Stockholm, he was called by Louis XVI. to the place of Minister for Foreign Affairs in the year 1774. He afterwards become one of M. Necker's most implacable enemies.

mission could not terminate more gloriously than it has done, and the place of confidence to which he has been called is a striking proof of the great consideration that he has acquired." The Magnificent Little Council therefore, much flattered by the honour that had been conferred upon their representative, ordered that a Latin inscription should be drawn up and be engraved upon a medal to be presented to M. Necker. The inscription was as follows:—"*Jacobo Necker, Regis Gallorum ærarii superadministratori, quod octo annos legatus apud Regem Christianissimum, eximia fide, peritia defunctus sit, civi optimo, de patria bene merito Senatus. Gen. D.D.* 1776."

This inscription was the first of the eighty-two which were drawn up in M. Necker's honour during the next few years, until the period of libels afterwards followed.

CHAPTER V.

THE GENERAL CONTROL OFFICE.

When M. Necker went from the Hôtel Leblanc to the General Control Office in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, instead of being the rich financier, and the husband of an amiable and attractive lady, he very soon became the foremost personage in France. His new functions brought him into communication with the King and the members of the royal family, with the men about the court, with the bishops, with the men of letters, and with the philosophers;—all of which intercourse I should like to characterise shortly, but without attempting to narrate the history of his administration. M. Necker's adversaries are content to be silent as to those five years of considerate and prudent conduct, during which he often succeeded in carrying triumphantly in his financial schemes those principles which are now received as indisputable axioms, but which were then hardly considered possible even by

the most enlightened minds. I will say only one word upon the character of this administration. The undoubted superiority of M. Necker over every other financier of those days lay in the fact that he saw clearly the points where reform was imperatively needed, and that, with a steady and piercing look, he was able to lay his hand upon the weak parts of the old worn-out machinery, some of which he condemned and put away as unfit for use, and the rest were broken afterwards by rougher and coarser hands. When, amid loud storms of anger, he reduced the number of middlemen, farmers-general, croupiers, stewards, receivers-general, into whose hands there always fell a good share of the revenues of the country; when he laboured to bring about a system of unity in the general keeping of accounts by suppressing some of the public pay offices, and also (what was a more difficult task) some of the treasurers; when he endeavoured to obtain that at a given date in each year a comparative statement of probable expenses and receipts should be made, enabling the one to be balanced against the other;—he did no more than bring into practice those principles on which financial matters are nowadays regulated in every civilised country in the world.

When, in matters not financial, he endeavoured to establish provincial assemblies throughout all France, of

which the functions, among other things, should be the apportionment of taxes, he laid the first foundations of the only one of French institutions which have become strengthened by successive political changes—that of the Conseils-généraux. And it is curious to note that in that project for a decree submitted to the King by M. Necker, we find under the title of *office* or *intermediary commission*, that system of a permanent commission which our legislature has recently thought advisable to borrow from Belgium, and which had formerly existed under the States in Languedoc and in Brittany. These commissions now work with tolerable regularity throughout all the departments, and though the administration may not be perfect, it is, taking it all in all, better for the people than the system of chance prefects to which they were formerly subjected.

Also, when a few months before he went out of office M. Necker published his famous *Compte Rendu*, throwing a light altogether unexpected upon obscure matters in the public finances, his bold innovations were suggested to him by a wise forethought which has since been fully justified by experience. His instinct in financial affairs revealed to him those inexhaustible resources which in a fertile and laborious country a wise government can command by appealing to the public credit; but he also saw very clearly that when public opinion

should become a power in the state the mysterious operations would cease to exist, and that the whole system of credit would then be founded upon publicity. This truth, which now appears to us to be a mere commonplace, was then a discovery hardly as yet imagined. To proclaim it was an act of great boldness, and we need not be surprised that M. Necker should have been denounced by his adversaries as betraying the secrets of the state. But it is very much more strange that writers should be found nowadays who still continue to urge this as a reproach against him.

Another feature in M. Necker's administration was that he was constantly thinking of the condition of the poor people, those who were needy and in want. When an importunate woman coming to him to solicit a favour asked. "What is a thousand crowns a year to the King?" we all know what answer he made to her question: "A thousand crowns! they represent the taxes collected from a whole village." The thought of the cares of poor and suffering people, "whose voice," he says in one of his works, "is never heard in advance, and who can only bless or mourn for any long period of time," occasionally inspires him with theories that are aggressive enough, upon the origin and the limits of the right of property—theories which M. Janet, in his interesting

studies on *Les Origines du Socialisme Contemporain*, has not unjustly reproached as socialistic. Let us, however, forgive these theories because of the sentiments by which they were prompted; and we may also recollect that it was these same sentiments that made him say in his *Traité sur l'Administration des Finances*, after he had considered what would be the total sum of money that the taxes of the country would produce to the King: "I wish that when they consider this statement the Administration would see something more than the political power of the monarch, I wish that they could read as though it were written in letters of fire, the fearful extent of the sacrifices exacted from the people." It was strange enough to find ideas such as these in the successor of an Emery[1] or a Terray;[2] and we may claim for M. Necker a share in the eulogium which Louis XVI. pronounced upon Turgot when he said, "It is only M. Turgot and I who love the people."

These philanthropical sentiments were not the only ideas that were shared by the monarch and by

[1] Michel Particelli d'Emery, brought into France by Mazarin, was appointed by him Controller-General in 1643. The unpopularity of his financial measures was one of the reasons that brought about the war of the Fronde. He died in 1650.

[2] The abbé Joseph Marie Terray, born in 1715, died in 1778, was Controller-General from 1769 to 1774. The financial scandals of his administration completely dishonoured the last years of the reign of Louis XV.

his minister. There was more than one characteristic feature common to them both. They had both the same irreproachable honesty in their private lives, the same straightforwardness in their political aims, and also the same indecision when the moment came in which they must make up their minds to choose for themselves a line of action and to follow it out energetically. But there was in Louis XVI. more simple-mindedness and less of self-thought, in M. Necker more intelligence and greater sagacity. Therefore in the dealings between the King and the Minister, the two men were perpetually working at cross purposes. Louis XVI. thought that the homely virtues in which he was giving example to every one were sufficient to draw France out of the difficulties into which it had been driven by the abuse of the royal power, and he used to dream that a paternal government, such as was that of Louis XII., would be the most beneficial for his people. M. Necker, who knew men's minds more accurately, was fully persuaded that a change in the constitution of the kingdom was absolutely necessary, and he would have wished to bring about this change gradually; but the King saw in all this attempt nothing else than an encroachment on the prerogatives of the royal power. However severely Louis XVI. may have judged the political conduct of M. Necker, he never lent his ear to those

calumniators who tried to make him believe that his minister was labouring to ruin the whole system of monarchical government. And on his side, M. Necker, twice abandoned by the King at times when such desertion was hard to bear, never lost an opportunity to render his grateful homage to the prince who had, for a time at least, shown him marks of his confidence. Mme. de Staël was fully justified in publishing, for her father's honour, the following lines which she found after his death, and which were written by him when he was lamenting the execution of Louis XVI.:—

O Louis, excellent prince and the best of men, may I never write anything in which I do not speak of your virtues as worthy of belief, or in which I do not invoke in your defence the only lasting judgment, that of posterity. Innocent victim, if ever there was one! Innocent victim of human passions! What an impious sacrifice!

If shortly before the Revolution Marie Antoinette entered with violence into all the hatred shown against M. Necker by those persons by whom she was surrounded, at least, at the time we are now considering, she had wit enough not to lend her hand to those intrigues of which the people about her wished to make her the instrument. Scolded roundly by her mother for the part that she had taken in the disfavour of Malesherbes and of Turgot, she had made up her mind, callously enough, not again to interfere directly in

public affairs. But she readily lent herself to those sacrifices that were demanded of her, among others the reform of her own household, and also that of the King, both of which were demanded in the plans set forth by M. Necker. She did not think, as people endeavoured to persuade her, that it was necessary for royal dignity to maintain in her court a host of titular offices with strange sounding names, except (so great was the disorder resulting from the seven or eight cash offices charged to pay the wages to all hired servants) when her footmen for want of money went begging in the streets of Versailles, as did those of Louis XV.[1] Nor was she ill-pleased at the resistance, often feeble enough, which M. Necker showed to the demands of a greedy clique with which she was unhappily surrounded. The Duc de Guines[2] having obtained through the Queen, in

[1] The Baron Auguste de Staël has given, in his Introductory to the life of his grandfather, the enumeration of the offices that were suppressed by M. Necker. This enumeration comprises among other things:— "Quatre coureurs de vin," or wine purveyors; "huit sommiers de bouteille," or cellarers; "dix sommiers de broches," or knights of the spit; "seize hâteurs de rôt," or turnspits: "quinze galopins," scullions; "deux aides pour les fruits de Provence," or purveyors of dessert; etc. . . .

[2] The Comte de Guines, who had been made a duke by Louis XVI., had previously been ambassador, first at Berlin and afterwards in London. He stood in high favour with Marie Antoinette; and she screened him very effectually in a lawsuit which was brought against him when he returned from London for smuggling and for gaming with public money. The marriage spoken of in the text was that of the daughter of the Duc de Guines with the son of the Marquis de Castries.

spite of M. Necker, a marriage portion of a hundred thousand crowns for his daughter, thought that he would show his wit and his dexterity to M. Necker by thanking him for his good offices. M. Necker therefore wrote to him in reply:—

MONSIEUR LE DUC,

In spite of the value that I attach to your gratitude, I ought in truth not to accept that which does not belong to me. Every time the Queen did me the honour to speak to me of your request, as a royal administrator of the finances of the country I made to her Majesty every observation I could against that which I felt it was not my duty to allow. Her Majesty then told me that the King's pleasure should be made known to me, and from that moment I had only to show my respect and my obedience. You see, therefore, M. le Duc, that if the King gives me his orders, you owe me nothing. After this avowal, which deprives me of a claim to your goodwill, I beg you to believe my sincere wish to deserve it, and I will lose no opportunity to show you that this shall be my earnest endeavour.

Although the Duc de Guines held a position of great favour near to Marie Antoinette, she did not manifest any sign of ill-will when this rebuff was addressed to her favourite, and when M. Necker some time afterwards sent in his resignation, Mme. Necker wrote to the curé of one of the parishes in Paris: "There is still left to us one consolation, if there can be one in this world, the Queen shares our patriotism, for on Saturday she cried the whole day long."

With the other members of the royal family M.

Necker was not upon such a friendly footing. We shall presently see that the hand of the Comte d'Artois was in the intrigue that brought about his defeat. A few months after his appointment at the head of the administration of finance, he had the perilous honour to find himself in direct opposition to Monsieur. He who, at a later date, under the title of Louis XVIII., rendered to France such signal services and gave to her ten of her best years, was then specially bent upon increasing and making the most of his own personal fortune. He had at first claimed to be allowed to settle upon himself and upon Madame a capital sum of 2,500,000 livres as a loan for their lives. When M. Necker refused to accede to this claim, he put in a demand for the repayment to him of a credit of 1,064,191 livres, 18 sols, 3 deniers (we see that no item was forgotten), which he said was owing to him from the estate of the Dauphin and the Dauphiness, his father and mother. He instructed his intendant Cromot[1] to set forth to M. Necker this tardy claim, and Cromot concluded his letter in the following terms:—

In complying with the orders of Monsieur, I have to warn you that he remembers that you thought that this matter had been submitted to and had been agreed upon by your predecessors.

[1] Cromot du Bourg bore the title: "Intendant des finances, bâtiments, arts, et jardins de Monsieur."

Monsieur cannot believe that you have other reasons that would be injurious to him; and if an attempt has been made to lead you into error, you may easily satisfy yourself by verifying the facts by examination in your own office. I will show the answer, with which you will be good enough to favour me, to Monsieur, who waits for it with much impatience.

The claim was put in a straightforward way; the importance of the application and the attempt at intimidation was barely concealed. A minister less conscientious than M. Necker might perhaps have yielded. But he did not waver in his determination, and a few days afterwards he replied to Cromot by a letter which he terminated as follows:—

It is true, sir, that I have caused researches to be made to ascertain whether this claim had not been already put forward. The reasons that induced me to think so were plausible enough. Knowing your activity in the interests of Monsieur, and also your understanding with him, it appeared to me extraordinary that, considering the many years during which you might have brought forward this claim, you should have chosen the moment in which the finances of the country are terribly overweighted by a war that has been extremely costly; and I cannot conceal from you that, having made many fruitless researches into this matter, I am now fully certain that this claim was made, and that it was rejected, under the late King, as is shown by the report of M. l'abbé Terray, and also that I place the fullest confidence in these documents until you can assure me of the contrary.

In all this affair I will submit to the orders of the King if Monsieur demands that I should do so. But I thought that I ought first to let my own sentiments be known, so that Monsieur may choose another mediator if he so chooses, or make further inquiry into the matter. And as the King is not unwilling that

you should urge the claims set forward by Monsieur according as you judge expedient, I hope that his Royal Highness will not be displeased that I should discuss the interests of his Majesty, according as my conscience directs me.

It is needless to add that Monsieur made no further demand; but I doubt very much if the intendant who received a formal contradiction so politely given, and also the Prince himself, ever pardoned M. Necker for this letter.

If M. Necker had often to contend against difficulties such as that which I have just mentioned, he must on the other hand have felt himself to be greatly encouraged by the marks of confidence that were shown to him from all sides. There is perhaps nothing which would more fully bring back to life the ideas which were prevalent in France under the reign of Louis XVI. than the publication of the thousands of letters, harangues, and verses, which were addressed to M. Necker during the first five years of his official life. And nothing also would give us greater cause for regret that so many generous sentiments, so much real and true good-will, should not have been able to prevent the final catastrophe. Looking through the whole period of her history, France was never actuated by better feeling than during those first fifteen years of the reign of Louis XVI. No sovereign was ever guided by intentions more pure, no order of nobility was ever

better disposed to bring reform into its own body, no nation ever listened more intently, or was ever more heartily disposed, to good and high ideas. When we recollect that to seek out the causes of this tragic disaster we must go back for more than a century to find the beginnings of a false and baneful policy, we become frightened at the fearful fatality overhanging human affairs unless we can bring a firm and strong will to act against it, and then we attempt to fathom the meaning of the words:

Delicta majorum immeritus lues.

From the many proofs showing the very singular popularity that M. Necker enjoyed, I will choose those which show to us most clearly the ideas then prevalent in two different classes of society. There would be nothing strange that a minister who was at once a foreigner and a man not of noble birth should find leagued against him the nobles about the court, and that all the courtiers should cabal to conspire against him. But there was nothing of the kind. If M. Necker stirred up against himself the implacable hatred of people whose claims he could not allow, and in particular in the four families which were called the *four corners of the Queen,* he found warm-hearted partisans amongst the highest families of the grands seigneurs. The Montmorencys, the

La Rochefoucaulds, the Noailles, the Mouchys, the Beauvaus, the Crillons, the Maillys, and many others, have by their letters shown their disinterested attachment to M. Necker. I will select a few letters which by their tone seem to me best adapted to show what sentiments were then prevalent in a certain portion of the court of Louis XVI. Nearly all these letters were written either upon the occasion of the publication of M. Necker's *Compte Rendu*, or else at the time of his retirement from office. If we wish to see with what feelings this *Compte Rendu* was viewed by a marshal in the French army, who was destined to perish upon the scaffold together with his wife and his granddaughter, we may read the letter written by the Maréchal Duc de Mouchy [1]:—

VERSAILLES, 17*th February*, 1781.

I have just read, sir, with enthusiasm, the admirable report that you have presented to the King. Nothing can be finer and more touching to any man to whom is given the power of thought; nothing is more likely or better adapted to influence every good Frenchman with love for his master, and with gratitude for having chosen such an active and enlightened minister, who, in four years, has done that which would render a whole life's work illustrious. I also pay my sincere compliment to the worthy and respectable companion of your labours in matters so interesting and so arduous. Every good patriot ought to pray

[1] Philippe de Noailles, Maréchal Duc de Mouchy, born in 1715, mounted the scaffold in 1794, as did also his wife, Anne Claude d'Arpajon.

that you may yet be preserved to France for another century. I should not be the last to wish for this most ardently.

I have the honour to be, sir, with never-ceasing friendship, your very humble and very obedient servant,

N. Maréchal Duc de Mouchy.

I hope most anxiously that this masterpiece will become spread about through the country.

If we wish to see how those courtiers who had grown old in the court of Louis XV., and who when they were young had seen things managed very differently, judged the events of the new reign and what they thought of M. Necker's undertaking, we may now read a letter written by a trembling and weakened hand, by a man whose name we are hardly accustomed to see associated with all this movement of ideas during the early years of the reign of Louis XVI.—by that Comte de Tressan[1] whom Marie de Leckzinska called the most charming of worthless men, and upon whom she imposed the task of writing hymns by way of pennance :—

Franconville, *Tuesday.*[2]

Sir,

I was brought up under the Regent and at the Court of the late King, by an uncle who taught me how to look clearly

[1] Élisabeth de Lavergne, Comte de Tressan, born in 1705, died in 1789, had been grand marshal in the palace of the court of the King Stanislas. He translated a great many of the romances of chivalry, adapting them according to the taste of the day. He was a member of the French Academy.

[2] This letter, which bears no date, must have been written when M. Necker had fallen into disfavour.

into things. I am now very old, but my sight has not grown dim, and I moan over that which I see around me, and that which I foresee. You, sir, and her whose pure heart is equal to your own, are the only people who can now, at this time, remain firm and tranquil. I spent yesterday an hour with M. de Buffon, who has been my friend for the last fifty years, and I kissed, with tears in my eyes, a letter that was well calculated to instruct and to sink deep into the heart of a truly wise man. Allow me, sir, again to vow to you the feelings of attachment and the affection with which you have filled me. I will admire you, will respect you, will love you until my last breath. I beg of you to put me at the feet of Mme. Necker. My heart was torn yesterday as I passed by Saint Ouen. I envy the happiness of the door-keeper of your house.

Pray do not long deprive me of the honour and the happiness of coming to pay to both of you a truly devoted homage; and when you would wish to see one of your most faithful servants, I beg of you to call that old Tressan, who at this moment does not know, among enlightened people, any one more happy than M. and Mme. Necker.

Sometimes these marks of enthusiasm came to M. Necker from a quarter very near to that in which he expected to find his bitterest enemies. We may now see how the father-in-law of the lady who was the Queen's particular friend, the Vicomte de Polignac,[1] discontented, it is true, at what he thought was an act of injustice done to him, poured forth his enthusiasm

[1] The Vicomte de Polignac had been appointed ambassador in Switzerland through the protection of Marie Antoinette, although the post was also coveted by the President Vergennes, a brother of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. His brother bore the title of *Comte Jules*, before he was made a duke by Louis XVI.

and his complaints in a letter he wrote to M. Necker:—

I did not think, sir, that it was possible for me to add to the feelings of high esteem and admiration with which you have already filled me, but after reading your work I do not know what words to use to show you how strong is the impression it has made upon me. Every good Frenchman ought to shed tears as he reads it, and every good patriot ought to be ready to give his blood. Allow me to recall to your recollection that when I was in Switzerland I had the honour of sending to you a few weak ideas of patriotism, a sort of project, a crude scheme, showing that the administration of finance demanded to be wholly re-cast. I saw, as through a multiplying glass, a quantity of abuses and malpractices and pilferings, and with it all a tacit understanding. Nothing is so disheartening to a loyal subject and true patriot as to see such things allowed. I then made up my mind. I said farewell for ever to the court. I should have been quite useless there; my frankness and a man of my age would have been altogether out of place. If, sir, I was sufficiently known to you, you would not doubt the sincerity and the candour with which I now express myself. These sentiments come from a heart that is really touched with admiration for your most uncommon virtue.

Many ladies also about the court showed themselves not less favourably disposed to M. Necker. Boileau has said,

Jamais surintendant ne trouva de cruelles;

but the satire implied in Boileau's line will not apply to M. Necker. If the ladies declared themselves in his favour we must attribute it partly to that fashion which urged them to take an interest in matters perhaps

a little beyond their understanding—as they had already done, following the example set by the abbé Galiani, in the question of the buying and selling of corn. In the first rank of Mme. Necker's female supporters we must place the Maréchale de Beauvau, who, talking with much eagerness in her drawing-room upon the equality of conditions, showed herself somewhat offended because Target took advantage of her want of attention to help himself unceremoniously from her snuff-box, but who, as events fully showed, remained true to her opinions and faithful to her friends; the Duchesse de Lauzun, whose playful letter we have not forgotten, in which she confesses to have been found in a quarrel in the Tuileries gardens with an unknown gentleman, who was saying evil things of M. Necker; the Princesse d'Hénin, who was afterwards one of Mme. de Staël's best friends; the Duchesse de Rohan, *née* d'Uzès, who when she learnt of M. Necker's retirement from office wrote to him, "that she was like a citizeness in grief;" the Comtesse de Marck, *née* Noailles, one of the correspondents of Gustavus III.; and the Duchesse d'Enville, who, since the time when she had made the acquaintance of Mme. Necker on the banks of the lake of Geneva, had not lost her taste for the philosophers. I might add many more names, but instead of prolonging the list I think it

better to place before the reader two letters which he may perhaps be glad to see, for they bear the signatures of two women for whom some interest has been shown within the last few years. One of these ladies is the celebrated Madame d'Épinay, who no doubt owed her acquaintance with the Neckers to her sister-in-law, Mme. d'Houdetot. She thus wrote to M. Necker, expressing her regret at his retirement from office :—

I feel, sir, that it is perhaps very indiscreet on my part to speak to you of the sorrow that I feel in common with all the public, and that I should take the liberty to assure you that no one participates in this sorrow more thoroughly than I do. All our common friends have wished to deprive me from the honour of writing to you; but my inclination prompts me to assure you once more of the high regard which I have ever professed for you. I add my gratitude for the zeal that you have shown in the public welfare, and also that you were so kind as to think of me during all this crisis. Forgive my indiscretion, it is a fault of my heart. The grace and the favour that I would ask of you is not to answer me; I have already been more than importunate enough. If I can hope that in some of your leisure moments you will do me the honour of coming to see me you will give me the greatest possible happiness. Receive with your customary kindness the assurance of the truest attachment, and with all the sentiments that veneration and gratitude can inspire, I am, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant.

D'ESCLAVELLES D'ÉPINAY.

PARIS, 20*th May*, 1781.

The other letter is from the Marquise de Créquy,[1] whose

[1] Renée Caroline de Froullay, born in 1714, in the château of Montflaux, in the lower part of the province of Maine, was left a widow at

so-called *Mémoires*, fabricated by M. de Courchamp, had made of her a malicious-minded and evil-speaking woman, but who in reality was witty, clever, and kind-hearted. Her enthusiasm for M. Necker is all the more notable because, as is well known, Sénac de Meilhan was her best friend, and he had done all that he could to make her change her opinion. She wrote to him one day: "Go away, impudent fellow, M. Necker is coming;" and perhaps this little outburst of humour may serve to explain the feelings which Sénac de Meilhan bore against M. Necker. However this may be, his influence did not weigh very strongly with her, for we may now see how she wrote concerning him:—

MONTFLAUX (BAS MAINE),
18*th August*.[1]

You will sympathise with me, madam, in my solitude, for I have a great desire to talk. I left Paris more than a month ago, and after having been long uneasy about M. Necker, I have been assured that he has regained his health; but I know the effects of sensitiveness and I want to be again reassured. I feel confident, madam, that you will not disapprove of the liberty I am

twenty-six years of age by the death of her husband, the Marquis de Créquy. She was sixty-eight when she became acquainted with Sénac de Meilhan, who was then forty-six. She died in 1803. Her letters to Sénac de Meilhan were published in 1856 by Édouard Fournier, with an introductory preface by Sainte Beuve. The apocryphal character of the pseudo *Mémoires de la Marquise de Créquy* is there shown with indisputable evidence.

[1] This letter also might serve as evidence; for in these *Mémoires* the Neckers are spoken of with great uncharitableness.

taking. I am authorised by the voice of the people with whom I am in communication; and when they become more orderly, I find the same thoughts and almost the same language. Every one takes an interest in Aristides. I will always put my faith in him. It is the man himself; and if we had an assembly in which there came up a question of justice every one would turn to him as they did in Athens.

I cannot help feeling the evil days that are coming on my country. I cannot put these ideas on one side; and here we are upon the eve of a famine. Corn will become scarce. The farmer will be unable to bear it, and will try to save what little he can get. The owner of the soil when he gets little rent will cause much disturbance. In foreseeing that all this is not very far distant, I say, Oh Aristides, what a help you would have been to me! And then I weep all alone, with no one to see me; for I perceive that these people never think of the future. In that they are so far happy.

Pliny the younger, when he had lost his friend, feared that he wo uldbecome less virtuous. I assure you, madam, that I fear I shall not begin to practise virtue since I see how it is treated, and that in spite of better instincts there are moments in which I feel myself to be weak, selfish, and interested. A great example in high position elevates the soul, his every action gives one a spirit of consolation. It is true that the base-hearted have become jealous, but no one has been able to call in question the virtues of Aristides. I have been told that the report to the King is printed. If so I shall certainly procure it. I find that there is in it one very great fault. There is not one word in it that is not true, and that is unpardonable.

I expect to return next month or early in October. Will you allow me, madam, to go once to pay to you the respects that one owes to virtue, and to touch the sleeve of Aristides; and also to assure both of you of the feelings of veneration and affection with which I have the honour to be, madam, your very humble and very obedient servant,

La Marquise douarière De Créquy.

If M. Necker found such a hearty welcome from people to whose rank of life he did not belong by birth we may imagine with what degree of enthusiasm his accession to power was hailed by the men of letters who were always assiduous in paying their respects to his wife. Although he did not show himself to be specially intimate with them in his own drawing-room, they were nevertheless bound to consider as one of themselves the author of the *Éloge de Colbert*, a work that had been crowned by the French Academy. They all clustered round him, each man maintaining the character peculiar to himself, with which we have already become acquainted. Marmontel was obsequious, Diderot declamatory, Grimm flattering, but with delicacy. Marmontel in his praise becomes ecstatic. He writes to Mme. Necker:—

Here we are at last. It is not only M. Necker who has covered himself with glory; it is the King. We no longer see confused notions of economy, and ideas scattered about here and there, as was the case before this present ministry, all of which were found to be as impracticable as they were over-minute and fanciful. We have now a large and sound scheme, which embraces everything, and puts everything upon the same level. It is a sure and firm step onward which goes directly to its object in a straight line. It is a geometrical method applied to economy. Under this new order of things nothing is timid, and nothing is left to chance. Instead of the usual words: "*For such is our good pleasure*," the King ought to write, "*For such is eternal justice, and the everlasting order of things.*"

It is not only cries of admiration that are forced from Marmontel; as he reads the manuscript of the *Compte Rendu* tears flow from his eyes and run down his cheeks. He fancies he sees Hercules armed with his club to slay the hydra of calumny, or rather (for such a simile would not suit the modesty of M. Necker's feelings) the Saint Michael of Raphael as he is crushing the dragon under his feet. Marmontel gives his advice upon everything, upon the government of landed property and upon the financial accounts of the navy. By dint of speaking upon financial matters the fever lays hold of him and he sends to Mme. Necker a long digest of his own invention:—

Friday Morning.

I dream of nothing else than finance, madam, and M. Necker cannot be more busy with it than I am. It is not that I have become a better citizen, but the interest of friendship is joined to that of patriotism. I have hastily written down the dream that occurred to me this morning. Have the kindness to read it; and if you do not think it too commonplace, or too carelessly considered, you may throw it to M. Necker, and say to him: "*Look here, this poor fellow has gone mad out of friendship for us.*"

I hope, madam, to have the honour of dining with you; but I did not wish to delay longer to prove to you that my first thought after I awoke was upon that subject which is more interesting to you than any other, and that I was impatient to tell you not of what I dreamt but of whom I dreamt.

Diderot was not so lavish in his enthusiasm, for he was less intimate in the house. But still every now and then he is careful as to the interests of his son-in-law,

whom he recommends to M. Necker, trusting that with his good nature he may be able to find employment for the lad; and he begs Mme. Necker to send him her little pamphlet in which she had set forth the results obtained in that hospital which now bears her name. This letter, which was first published not long since in the new edition of Diderot's works, will show the measure of his admiration:—

MADAM,

I do not know whether it is to you or to M. Thomas that I owe the new edition of *L'Hospice;* but in order that I may not be backward with either of you, allow me to thank you both. I wished to have *L'Hospice,* so that I might join it to the *Compte Rendu,* and so have in one volume the two most interesting works that I have ever read, or that I ever can read. In the one I saw justice, truth, courage, dignity, reason, and genius, unite all their forces to repress the tyranny of powerful men; and in the other, beneficence and the most tender pity join together their charitable hands to that portion of the human race which is the most to be pitied—the indigent sick. The *Compte Rendu* teaches sovereigns to prepare for themselves a glorious reign, and their ministers to justify their administration in office to the people. *L'Hospice* instructs every founder and director of a hospital as to what his duties should be: great lessons which for a long while will remain unproductive; but those who have given these lessons will always have in this world the admiration and the good-will of their contemporaries, and will deserve, either during their lifetime or after their death, a public monument, on which we shall see them either as the lords of this world, or else stooping to pick up the poor fallen creatures.

This, madam, is what I think in common with all honest-minded citizens as to these two productions. But should it happen that you are told that I have stood dumb before some

unhappy persons in whom the feeling of honour was stifled, or never gained a footing, and who had the impudence to attack them, you may believe it. Indignation and contempt, when they are deep, show themselves but do not speak; and I am persuaded that there are circumstances in which we do not do honour to virtue by undertaking to defend it.

DIDEROT.

Grimm was still in Russia when he heard of M. Necker's accession to office. It was the Empress who first told him the news; and in sending his communications to Mme. Necker by letter he did not lose the opportunity of telling her of the flattering intimacy which the Empress Catherine showed to him.

The Empress has just told me, madam, that the King has appointed M. Necker to the administration of one of the most important branches of his finance. As she has some knowledge of the business, and as she declares that she long since recognised the talents of M. Necker, she pronounced a splendid eulogium upon a young king who was clever enough to be able to choose his ministers so well. Then she showed me her gift of prophecy, which all people of this sort have to a greater or less extent, foretelling what the natural consequences of this choice would be. In this I agreed perfectly with what her Majesty said. Then she asked me what would be your verdict upon the matter. I promised her, madam, that I would ask you, and that I would communicate to her your reply. Then she told me that the choice of the King was unanimously approved of by public opinion in Paris, so that public opinion, the Empress, and myself, agree perfectly in the appointment made by the most Christian King. From all this there sprang a conversation, in which the Empress showed me her principles and her manner of administration in her financial department, and as the new management she has introduced

and the methods she has contrived for diminishing some portion of the burdens of her people every year are not the least remarkable events in her reign, it happened owing to the happy choice that his Majesty has made in appointing M. Necker, I had a most agreeable and a most interesting conversation, which lasted for the best part of the evening. I have one or two of these conversations every day; and I spend my life in learning the principles of the grand art of governing. If my memory was good enough, and I had the talent to be able to describe these conversations, showing every variety of tone and colouring, which is ever constantly changing, I should have written one of the most interesting and one of the most curious books of the century. There is only one serious inconvenience in my present mode of life: that is, that I see the Empress too often; for not many days pass but that, from midday to nine or ten in the evening, she wishes to see me; and therefore it happens that the oftener I see her the more I become attached to her, and the oftener she sees me the sooner will she become tired of me. Still she can send me away when she has had enough of me, and I can treasure up all my life with feelings of gratitude the recollection of my happiness, and of her goodness.

When the Empress had had enough of him, and when Grimm had come back to France, "the celestial baron" as Catherine called him, continued to transmit to M. and Mme. Necker the compliments of the Empress and those of the princes with whom he kept up a correspondence. Although she declared that "the finances of the most Christian King was a very disgusting subject," Catherine viewed with keen interest the reforms introduced by M. Necker, and she was fully persuaded that "he had been sent by Heaven to

liberate the finances of France from the very embarrassed state in which he had found them." "Poor people!" she wrote to Grimm when she heard the news, frivolous enough, to the effect that M. Necker had given rise to scandal by appearing in big boots in the galleries at Versailles,—"poor unbooted people, who cannot tolerate those who are too firm in their own convictions, who have in them too much rectitude, who are too difficult, too rational, too strong, and too much imbued with right dealing. All that is inconvenient." And these opinions of Catherine were faithfully communicated to M. Necker by his wife. But this part of middle-man was not sufficient for Grimm, and in writing to Mme. Necker to express the admiration he felt upon reading her husband's report upon the provincial assemblies, he spoke in terms of which Diderot even might have been jealous :—

I have the honour, madam, to send to you the report which M. Meister gave me this morning from M. Necker. After reading such a report we became reconciled to our existence, and we feel some energy infused into our poor souls, become withered by the continual spectacle of misfortune and folly. I who was not for one moment moved by the forty Barmécides[1] massacred in a fit of giddiness by a prince who otherwise was full of goodness and generosity,—I sobbed as I rapidly read this heavenly report. It is a pity that such a composition cannot be put forth for the

[1] La Harpe's tragedy, *Les Barmécides*, had then been played at the Théâtre Français, and had been hissed.

benefit of the public. It is a masterpiece of wisdom and of reasoning, of that real and deep sensitiveness which we hear talked about everywhere, and which we can nowhere find. When we see a good king counselled and prompted in this manner we feel that we can repose in peace, and we say to ourselves that in spite of the light-heartedness and the temerity of public feeling, and the impulsion which is often given to it, without suspecting any particular intrigue, or any special motive of interest, that it is impossible that the nation should not at last, by general acclamations, and a lively show of gratitude, reward the efforts of a virtuous and enlightened minister, when they are guided by such rare wisdom towards the summit of happiness.

Mme. d'Épinay shares my feelings of gratitude. Reading this report has been a great relief to her in her constant sufferings, which are now more painful to her than ordinarily. I hope, madam, to be able to-morrow to present to you the homage of my respects.

This report upon the provincial assemblies, which ought never to have been published, was indiscreetly given into the printer's hands, and it proved one of the causes of M. Necker's downfall. It is a well-arranged exposure of the inconveniences of excessive centralisation and of the administration by the intendants. But if we may allow to pass his expression of that sensibility "which we hear talked about everywhere, but which we can nowhere find," we cannot understand that reading the report should cause tears to fall from Grimm's eyes — a circumstance which with him did not occur very frequently.

If we wish now to learn what was the judgment passed upon M. Necker by a man who was not usually too complacent to others, we may look to Buffon, whose proud nature bent with difficulty to recognise the merit of other people. In his correspondence with Mme. Necker, Buffon always speaks of her husband as "our great man." Sometimes he allows that it may be suitable to admit him as a third party into that friendship of which we have not yet forgotten the warm and impassioned nature. He wrote to M. Necker: "Never has my most worthy friend omitted to give to you a share and often a half of those sentiments which she has been so good as to extend to me." But it was especially at the time of the publication of the *Compte Rendu* that Buffon's admiration showed itself at its greatest height; for the manner in which he then expressed himself reminds one of the *Magna Sonaturum* that Mme. Necker proposed to inscribe upon the pedestal of his statue:—

Hitherto, my noble friend (he wrote to Mme. Necker), I have considered your illustrious husband only as a man of genius, with a halo of glory spread all round about his fine character, and whose body, arms, hands, and even wings, and all his acting organs are at the same time enveloped in a cloud, which hides from us the remaining part of his divine nature, lest, as the painters say, it would become too human; now, because of that composition, written in letters of gold, by means of the *Compte Rendu* to the King, I see M. Necker not only as a genius

but as a tutelary god, the lover of humanity, who, every time he shows himself causes himself to be worshipped the more ardently. I would say as much of his other half, but you would disavow this claim, my noble friend; your modesty, greater even than your high virtues, would always keep its veil, if it were only to moderate its brilliancy—and for that I cannot but praise you the more strongly. Yes, I love you, I admire and respect both of you from the very bottom of my heart. I tell you this in truth, and in the enthusiasm which I have just felt after reading this unprecedented and ever memorable composition, which will do more good and redound more to the honour of our century than all our books put together into one heap.

The testimony of a man such as Buffon might well give M. Necker a feeling of just pride. Buffon's infatuation and the high opinion he had of himself have often been urged against him. But may not the same remark be made of the most illustrious men among his contemporaries, and must we exact from a man that modesty which refuses to believe about himself the praises which are given to him by judges who are altogether disinterested?

As he had received such strong support from the men of letters and the philosophers, M. Necker could have scarcely had reason to complain if he had found a systematic hostility planned against him from the clergy of the Catholic Church. There were many of the bishops who had not judged his appointment very favourably, and we find it stated in writing that the

opposition of the clergy as well as that of the parliament was one of the difficulties against which he had to contend. But a statement so general as this would not be exactly true. "I will give him over into your hands if you will undertake to pay France's debts," M. de Maurepas replied to a bishop who taunted him because a Protestant had been appointed to such a high public office. But in those days there was not in the upper clergy in France that same unity of opinion upon matters of doctrine that we now see amongst the members of the episcopacy, for the bishops were then divided into more than one party. There was first that which was called the devout party, and these men were passionate rather than cunning in their attempts to combat the philosophical or Jansenist doctrines, and they showed the same zeal against the progress of tolerance in opinions as they did in punishing the impious. At the head of this party was the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont, whose name has acquired an unhappy celebrity because of a certain letter written by Rousseau. Another party, very different, was that of the bishops who were dependent upon the court, of whom the Cardinal de Rohan was the most brilliant and the most typical instance—a party who were concerned much more with intrigues and with gallantry than with theological quarrels, and who not without great

difficulty could be made to live for a few months consecutively in their dioceses. Between these two there was an intermediary party, who have sometimes been wrongly called the philosophical party, composed of prelates whose orthodoxy was sufficient, whose mode of life was honest, and who did not disdain the good opinion of the wits, nor did they refuse to mix in the society of the world. Amongst their members may be mentioned the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Champion de Cicé,[1] who played an important part in the Constituent Assembly; the Archbishop of Aix, Cucé de Boisgelin, who was elected into the French Academy in the place of Voisenon; the Archbishop of Bourges, Phelipeaux, who was placed by M. Necker at the head of the provincial assembly in Berry; the Archbishop of Narbonne, Dillon; the bishops of Puy, of Mirepoix, and also of other dioceses. It was part of M. Necker's system in his schemes for political reform to conciliate the clergy and to make them co-operate with him in his ideas. He therefore sought the assistance of these bishops, and it was willingly given.

Many letters were exchanged between these bishops

[1] Jerôme Marie Champion de Cicé, had previously been Bishop of Rodez. He presided over the Constituent Assembly on several important occasions. Appointed Keeper of the Seals by Louis XVI., he signed the civil constitution of the clergy. He emigrated during the Reign of Terror; he afterwards returned to France, and in 1802 was promoted to the seat of Aix. He died in 1810.

and Mme. Necker, who often acted as her husband's secretary; and from their letters we may see plainly enough that if the principle of toleration had not then become a part of the written law in France, it had (which perhaps will count for quite as much) become a part of the manners of the people. Some of us may be astonished to learn that in the highest ranks of the clergy there were men who judged the acts of M. Necker's administration not less favourably than Grimm and Diderot. After the publication of the *Compte Rendu* the Bishop of Mirepoix, Tristan de Cambon, wrote to Mme. Necker in these words :—

TOULOUSE, *7th March.*

I ought to have a grudge against you, madam; an admirable pamphlet has been issued from your house, and you do not send it to me. Some few persons have had copies, and I am obliged to borrow one from them to read it, as our booksellers have not yet got it. This pamphlet gives a simple and clear detailed account of what has been done. Magniloquence is not made use of except to bring out the smaller matters; and never was there less occasion for it. In point of fact we do not find it. M. Necker promises still greater things, and things which demand greater combinations—the gabels, the treaties between this and other countries, &c. So great is the strength shown by the mere statement of facts, that I consider M. Necker as placed upon an immense rock, against which all the waves of the sea will rush and dash themselves into pieces. I hope and trust this may be so, much more as a citizen than as being your friend. That which I admire the most is not what he has done, but, to take one of his own expressions, the moderation that he has shown. I am altogether of his opinion; this is an excellent

answer to the libels. I could not tell you too strongly what a good impression this pamphlet has caused. The Archbishop of Toulouse[1] cried over it, so strongly did it affect him; and this not only upon the first reading, but also afterwards. I think very highly of the report given of the hospitals, the prisons, &c. I agree with him fully upon every point. All this will greatly assist Mr. Burke[2] in his eloquent speeches, and it ought to conduce to bring about a happy and a lasting peace.

I have the honour to be, with respect, madam, your very humble and very obedient servant,

† THE BISHOP OF MIREPOIX.

Of all these letters the most agreeable are those from the Archbishop of Aix.[3] In them we may see the academician, the man of the world, and the prelate; and this frequent correspondence between a bishop of the old *régime* and a Protestant lady shows us a curious feature in the manners of the times. M. Boisgelin often came to Paris, and during his stay in the capital his tastes always attracted him towards Mme. Necker.

[1] The Archbishop of Toulouse was then Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne, who, born in 1734, had been appointed Archbishop of Toulouse in 1763. In 1787 he succeeded M. de Calonne as Controller General of Finance, and he was in turn succeeded by M. Necker. He died in 1794.

[2] This was Edmund Burke, born in Dublin in 1728, and died in 1797. England was at that time at war with America and with France, and Burke was very warm in the attacks he made against Lord North's ministry.

[3] Jean de Dieu Raymond de Cucé de Boisgelin had previously been Bishop of Lavaur. As Archbishop of Aix he had presided over the States of Provence, and was afterwards returned as a deputy to the Constituent Assembly, where he became noted because of the moderation of his opinions. He emigrated, and was afterwards made a Cardinal, and was appointed Archbishop of Tours, where he died in 1804.

But sometimes, as though he perceived that his presence caused some uneasiness to be felt in her drawing-room, where the freedom in conversation was great, he refrained from going there, and he wrote to Mme. Necker expressing his regret:—

It is a long while, madam, since I have had the advantage of paying my court to you. I have used, I know very well, a sort of reserve in doing so, and perhaps I may have been wrong. I thought that my last visit caused you some uneasiness. But I have for too long a time deprived myself of a pleasure which you know very well that I estimate at its full value. It is very pleasant to me to find in your conversation those noble sentiments and right-minded ideas which, we must allow, make of friendly intercourse the most agreeable relaxation both from solitude and from the routine of life in the world. I am sorry for you, madam, but in the middle of all this concourse of people who are fond of you, and whom I do not hate, you have the misfortune to think very often as I do, and I speak to you with confidence and with freedom of those same impressions and reflections which I believe I have in common with you. I have often wished to see you. Spare me therefore from this involuntary fear of coming at those times when I should cause you constraint. I went to see M. Necker this morning in Paris; I am told he comes there sometimes. I was not fortunate enough to find him. Accept the sincere and respectful attachment with which I have the honour to be, madam, your very humble and obedient servant,

† The Archbishop of Aix.

Mme. Necker doubtless did what she could to spare the Archbishop of Aix from this involuntary fear. But she was not altogether successful, for to a

letter reproaching him because he came to see her so seldom he replied again: "I can assure you and very truly that for some time I used some discretion in not going to see you; but it is also true that this gave me feelings of remorse. I felt that my prolonged discretion did me wrong, and you may be very sure that the remorse would become more painful when sharpened by regret."

These frequent journeys that the Archbishop of Aix made to Paris were prompted probably by some other reason than that of a liking for the world, which he confessed he did not hate. His well-timed labours had won for him a just popularity in his own diocese, and he must have felt that he was quite as capable in the administration of great affairs as more than one bishop who had already been appointed. But this honourable ambition was not satisfied, and a few years later, when he was definitely settled in his own diocese, he chose Mme. Necker as his confidante, and he expresses to her his griefs in a tone of melancholy in which there is a high tone and thoughtful dignity:—

You speak to me, madam, with much kindness, of a career to which I do not think I am destined. I have seen hopes vanish from me at times when I thought I might become successful; I will not again let myself be deceived. Of what value would experience be to us if it left in us all those vain hopes which I may call the errors of the future? Ten years

ago I made up my mind to a course of action, and I will not depart from it. I have the happiness of being able to interest myself in all that I do. I am sure of myself in my present occupations. My course of life is conformable to my duty, and agrees with my tastes. I will not let it escape beyond its own strength. M. Necker may enjoy a glory that he has earned for himself; agreeable recollections are the treasures of every moment. He knows the value of what he has done. He sees a whole revolution bursting forth from the effects of that work which he began, and doubtless he cannot forget an existence always made present to him by the force of public opinion. But those who have not filled high places must rest content with an honourable feeling of themselves, and with a few flattering marks of approbation, which, by a natural illusion, seem for the moment to stand in the place of those opportunities which they have missed. You have often judged me with an indulgence which has given me much pleasure, and I cannot prevent myself from submitting in confidence to your judgment.

Mme. Necker made also another conquest, and one much more difficult than that of this soft-minded prelate; that of the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont, he who was known as the leader of the devout party. It would have been strange if frequent communications had not passed between the head of the Paris diocese and the wife of the Controller-General of Finance when she had set the example, not a very common one, of a woman taking a very warm interest in trying to alleviate the public misery, and at the same time continuing to be mixed up with the ordinary affairs of the world. Mme. Necker's enemies have not been slow to turn to ridicule her excessive zeal,

and Weber, the foster-brother of Marie Antoinette, reproaches her in his *Memoirs* because of the ostentation with which she exercised her charity. To defend her from this reproach I will only say that of all the bundles of letters in the archives in Coppet the most voluminous is perhaps that which contains her correspondence with Mme. Reverdil, mother of the tutor of Christian VII.,[1] who was the bearer of that much-needed assistance sent by Mme. Necker to her poor friends or relations in the Canton of Vaud. As regards carrying on secretly the works necessary for the erection of that hospital which was then called l'Hôpital Necker, and which name it has borne ever since, this would have been for her a most difficult task; for it was in point of fact a public undertaking for which the King had provided the funds from his own chest, and of which she had only the administration. It was then attempted to prove by experience the possibility, without going to very great expense, of giving to each patient a separate bed. This was then considered as

[1] Élie Salomon François Reverdil, was a native of Nyon, a small town in the Canton of Vaud. He was tutor to the unfortunate and imbecile Christian VII., King of Denmark, husband of the celebrated Caroline Matilda; and he played a certain part in this country while his pupil was on the throne. When he returned to Switzerland, he was intimately acquainted with several well-known personages, among others, Voltaire, M. Necker, and Mme. de Staël. He died in Geneva in 1804.

a mark of great progress, and Mme. Necker devoted herself to this task with all the ardour that she put into everything which she attempted. At that time lay charity, which has now become fashionable, was not thought of, and the success of the undertaking depended upon the help given by the religious authorities. Mme. Necker saw the Sisters of Charity, and concluded with the superioress a bargain by which twelve of them were set apart to give their service at the hospital,[1] under the direction of the curé of Saint Sulpice. Arrangements such as these could not be made without the intervention of the Archbishop; and this fiery adversary of the philosophers and of the Jansenists did not hesitate to make the acquaintance both of M. and of Mme. Necker. He even invited them to dinner at the episcopal palace. This dinner was much talked about, and it gave rise to the following epigram:

Nous l'avons vu, scandale épouvantable!
Necker assis avec Christophe à table,
Et dix prélats savourant à l'envi
Et grande chère et nectar délectable.

[1] To Mme. Necker we also owe the idea of employing the Sisters of Charity to watch the female prisoners, an idea which has produced such admirable results. The first attempts made in France towards the amelioration of the hospitals date from M. Necker's administration; and it was to Mme. Necker that Lavoisier, in the name of his colleagues, paid homage on the project of reform drawn up by the *Académie des Sciences*.

L'Église en pleure, et Satan est ravi. . . .
Mais en ce jour d'une indulgence telle
Quel serait donc le motif important?
C'est que Necker. . . . le fait est très constant,
N'est janséniste ; il n'est que protestant.

And some time afterwards the Archbishop of Paris showed to them still greater tolerance than offering to M. Necker in the company of ten prelates "grande chère et nectar délectable." At the termination of a lawsuit the town of Paris had been condemned to pay him a large sum of money, and he then thought, so great was his confidence in the charitable intentions of M. Necker, that he could not make better use of this money than by putting it into his hands, "in order that," so says the deed of gift, "the said funds may be employed by my said sieur Necker according as he thinks best, and for such object of public utility as he shall think expedient; and I wish that he may not be obliged to render account of the use made of this said money except to his Majesty only." I doubt if nowadays (and I say this without any thought of criticising others) there be a prelate who would be willing to place such a large sum of money in the hands of a man professing a faith different to his own; but our old clergy have so often been accused of fanaticism and intolerance that I may be forgiven, even though it is now rather late, for having shown some of its most dignified

members, and men occupying the highest places, in a different and a more favourable aspect.

Besides these marks of confidence and of sympathy extended to M. Necker showing him the sentiments with which the privileged classes were thus animated, there may be added others, more modest and more humble, and for that reason more likely to be sweet to a man whose self-love was at once strong and delicate. These were letters that he received from different parts of the country, from gentlefolk, from military men, from the priors of monasteries and from the superioresses of convents; verses written by the workmen in the royal printing-office who had set up the type of the *Compte Rendu;* acrostics manufactured by the market-women effusive in laudatory compliments, and for which their authors expected to gain neither notoriety nor reward. However, among these enthusiastic admirers there were some who were not altogether disinterested, for, from among the large bundles of papers, I will select one written in the following terms :—

À MADAME NECKER,

Sous les traits de Mentor Minerve révérée,
Fit jadis au Crétois admirer ses vertus :
Le sage respecté, les préjugés vaincus,
Dressèrent à sa gloire un immortel trophée.

Dans le char d'Apollon conduite par les Ris,
Elle descend encore du céleste hémisphère;
Mais, pour rendre aux Français sa présence plus chère,
Elle a l'esprit de Necker et les traits de Cypris.

I will not continue to weary you, madam, by putting into rhyme that which the public is ever saying in prose. My voice is too feeble to join in that concert which the Muses sing every day to your honour; and I have not talent enough of my own to add a flower to that crown which they are preparing for you. I can offer you no homage except that of asking you to make a man happy. Your second metamorphosis must have quite fulfilled the prayers of a nation whose delights are to cultivate the sciences, and who glory in being subservient to the empire of the graces. If you will make something of a young honest man, who is as yet a nobody, this last transformation will not be as glorious for you, nor will it be very advantageous to the human race, but it will procure the happiness of one individual, and Minerva, in dictating the laws destined to make happy the people of Crete, did not forget the unfortunate creature who was bemoaning in the obscurity of outer darkness. Manners, no talent, a bad handwriting, a strong will, and a capability for great gratitude: these are all my claims. If they are not sufficient to obtain the favour for which I ask, perhaps the necessity will be sufficient excuse with you for the liberty which I am taking, and I will thank fortune for its hardships if, in making use of a pretext to offer you my homage, which will be confounded with that of the public in its most severe aspect, it does not make me incur your displeasure, and if I learn that you have not disdained the assurances of respect with which I am, madam,

Your very humble and obedient servant,

VERGNIAUD.

PARIS, 12*th December*, 1776.

(*Hôtel de l'Amérique, Rue des Vieux Augustins.*)

Vergniaud wrote this letter in the uncertain period of his youth, when studying theology at the Sorbonne. He also solicited the honour of being presented to Thomas, and he used to rhyme verses of which the above may serve as a sample. He was then twenty-three, and at that age such attempts may be forgiven. They show rather that the future chief of the Girondist party, "this young honest man who is as yet a nobody," had a strong desire to make a name for himself in the world.

M. Necker's popularity was at its zenith when he suddenly left office, his resignation being partly voluntary and partly forced upon him. The reasons are sufficiently well known. He was calumniated every day in pamphlets which his colleague Maurepas, who had cast aside all his old feelings of good-will, secretly encouraged. The most violent of these pamphlets which had appeared without an author's name had just been seized, when the lieutenant of police received a visit from an obscure personage, one Bourboulon, treasurer in the house of the Comte d'Artois, who bravely declared himself to be the author. This was a bold act, and the scandal caused was great; for Bourboulon, in claiming the responsiblity of a pamphlet which might cause him to be put into the Bastille, showed openly that he thought himself safe in the protection of one

high in authority. The Comte d'Artois himself was frightened at so much audacity, and after he had questioned his treasurer, made him disavow the act through his chancellor, M. de Montyon,[1] whom he commanded to write to M. Necker in the following terms:—

I have made a report to Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois of the minute, in which the sieur Bourboulon, his treasurer, makes an attack upon the truth of the statements made in the King's finances, which, by his Majesty's orders, you have given to the public. My attention has long since been drawn towards those matters which are discussed in this minute, and I am convinced that upon many points, as to which I have accurate knowledge, he has fallen into palpable error. I have explained this to Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, who has directed me to express to you his esteem and his affection, and to assure you that he has learned with much pleasure that the sieur Bourboulon was in fault.

This apology, privately made, was not, as we may easily understand, sufficient to satisfy M. Necker. He thought that, in order to reaffirm his credit, which might suffer from these attacks, tolerated and encouraged by Maurepas, who was then the first minister, he ought to exact some public mark of royal favour. He therefore

[1] Antoine Jean Baptiste Robert Auget, Baron de Montyon, is chiefly known because of his charitable works, among others the prizes which he founded, and which the French Academy continue to award every year. But M. Fernand Labour has recently published a book showing him to have been hard to his tenants; and unpopular, justly enough, upon his patrimonial property.

claimed an entry into the Council of State, which should also give to him a deliberative voice, that hitherto had been denied to him; and we must allow that in his important position, that of director of the finances of the country, it was singular that he should not have access to the council where all his projects were liable to be discussed and also to be refused. To this just demand M. de Maurepas replied, that if M. Necker wished to enter into the council he had only to change his religion. This was an irrelevant answer, and it was also an insult. M. Necker so understood it, and he sent in his resignation to the King. This letter was found in an iron chest in the national archives, and it was first published by Soulavie:—

The conversation I had with M. de Maurepas prevents me from delaying any longer to place my resignation in the hands of the King. It has broken my heart. I will dare to hope that your Majesty will be so gracious as to keep some recollection of the years of happy but very laborious work, and especially of the unlimited zeal with which I devoted myself to your service.

M. Necker did not attempt to dissimulate in this letter the sharpness of the sorrow caused by the determination he felt bound to accept as having no other alternative, and later this sorrow was changed into remorse. Of all the acts of his public life this voluntary resignation was the only one with which he reproached himself. When he saw all the misfortunes into which

his successors were leading the monarchy, he asked himself whether if he had not been in their place he could not have averted them, whether he was not overawed by the party to which he belonged, and whether, with more suppleness, dexterity, and patience, he could not, as the Queen asked him, have waited for the death of Maurepas, which was then imminent, and which would have left to him a free and open field. But no one then thought of bringing against M. Necker those reproaches which he afterwards brought against himself; his fall was attributed to the Court and to Court influence. To a greater extent even than in the case of Turgot's dismissal—of whose plans some were ill contrived and unpopular—this sudden and unaccountable disfavour into which M. Necker had fallen was one of the reasons that estranged Louis XVI. in the eye of public opinion. The very many and the unanimous expressions of sympathy fully justified Mme. Necker in writing a few years later:

The effect that was produced by M. Necker's retirement from office was so extraordinary that we ourselves were astonished, in spite of the feeling that we had of our own love for the public welfare, of our efforts, and even of our success. Resigned to the ingratitude of men, and wounded by the injustice of which we were the victims, we neglected at first to keep the letters which we received. By degrees we became astonished at their great number, and we resolved to keep this token of respect; but we had already burned a large quantity of these letters, and

those which now remain can give only a very poor notion of the marks of affection that M. Necker received.

This token of respect would, however, if all the letters were published, make a full-sized volume. From them I will select but one, and I take this letter in preference to any of the others because the writer bears a name but very little known :—

METZ, 29*th May*, 1781.

SIR,

Will you allow me to tell you, and to express to you the great sorrow I felt when I learnt that you no longer occupied that place which you have for some time past filled so worthily and with such great honour to France? No, I cannot longer contain my grief; my heart must open itself, and it would be but imperfectly assuaged if it did not flow out into your bosom. Look kindly upon those tears which escaped from me when, during the night, want of sleep allowing me to give full scope to all my thoughts, I meditated upon the coming downfall of France. The death of an aged and honourable father, whom I love with all my heart, can alone be compared to the sensations I felt when I read your returning of thanks. I know it was without interest that you obtained this important office. Your merit alone placed you there. You did all the good that it was possible for you to do. You were intending to do very much more, and when you had placed your own altar in each of our hearts, you suddenly resign your office. What a loss for the state! What matter for grief to every good citizen! Again, sir, allow me to tell you that this news has been an overwhelming blow to me. It has been as much to every one who sincerely wishes the welfare of his country. I am only their echo.

I am, with very profound respect, a respect that I cannot sufficiently express, your very humble and very obedient servant,

JACOB,
Regular Canon of the College of Saint Louis.

It is unnecessary to transcribe here the wailings of Marmontel and the others. But among the friends of M. and Mme. Necker there was one man who refused to lament over the fallen minister; that man was Gibbon. But his reason was one that both the husband and wife might read and not feel themselves to be hurt. "Your husband's condition," he wrote to Mme. Necker, "is always worthy of envy. He knows himself, his enemies respect him, Europe admires him, and you love him!"

What would have happened if M. Necker had still retained the confidence of Louis XVI., and if sufficient time had been given to him to complete his vast projects of political and financial reform? It is ever easy to invent history after the times have passed and gone, and to say with an air of assurance what would have happened if this or that event had not taken place. M. Necker's enemies may say if they like that his imprudent concessions brought about the French Revolution. It would not be less easy to maintain that he would have prevented it if he had not been sacrificed for no reason to petty jealousies. But we may at any rate say with certainty that the monarchy would have been in a much sounder state if the financial deficit had not placed it at the mercy of the States General, and that M. Necker would have saved the

monarchy from the deficit. Malouet[1] in his *Memoirs* pronounces a judgment still more favourable to M. Necker, and I may perhaps be allowed to quote in this place the opinion of perhaps the only man who saw the whole of this fearful tragedy, and who has never been accused of self-delusion nor of weakness: "Whatever may be said, it was from the time of M. Necker's resignation of office in 1781, and from the incapacity of his successors, that date those disorders which brought us to the government by the States-General."

[1] Pierre Victor Malouet, born at Riom in 1740, first joined the Admiralty, and was afterwards made intendant at the port of Toulon. Returned as deputy to the States-General, he became remarkable for the constancy of his opinions and for the moderation he exercised in showing them. He escaped from the September massacres, and fled to England. He returned to France in 1801, and was then made Councillor of State, but his independent will brought him into disfavour. He was appointed minister of the Admiralty by the temporary government of 1814, and his position in office had been confirmed by Louis XVIII., but he died immediately afterwards. His *Memoirs* were published in 1868.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SALON IN THE RUE BERGÈRE.

M. AND MADAME NECKER had let, perhaps rather imprudently, their hôtel in the Rue de Cléry, so that when they left the apartments in the Central Office they were obliged to look out for another house in which to live. They established themselves in the Rue Bergère, and there they remained until M. Necker again took office in 1788. These seven years of M. Necker's life were perhaps to him the most glorious. His administration had been prosperous, and it was suddenly brought to an end by some unaccountable misfortune; all the faults of his successors therefore redounded to his honour and to his glory. None of these men were able to throw into the shade him who had so strongly stirred the imagination of every thinking mind in France. His successors were the timid Joly de Fleury,[1] to all

[1] Joly de Fleury belonged to an old family of magistrates, and was appointed Councillor of State in 1781. He was in office only for a short time.

of whose measures the people found some rhyme with the refrain,

Si c'est du Fleury
Ce n'est pas du joli;

the honest but incapable d'Ormesson,[1] the frivolous Calonne,[2] the insignificant Fourqueux, the blundering Loménie de Brienne. M. Necker's situation resembled that of the Duc de Choiseul during the last years of the reign of Louis XV. He had become the man to whom all eyes were turned; he was the recognised leader of that great liberal party who wished for reform, but who did not wish for revolution. His reputation had become European, and immediately after his downfall the sovereigns of other countries testified to him the marks of their esteem. He received a letter from the Marquis Caraccioli in the name of the King of Naples, offering to him to come and place himself at the head of the government of the two Sicilies. The Empress Catherine wrote to Grimm: "M. Necker is no longer in office. France has just awoke from her glorious dream, and her

[1] Henri François de Paule Lefebvre d'Ormesson d'Amboise, like his predecessor, belonged to an old family of magistrates. He was in office only for a few months.

[2] Charles Alexander de Calonne, born at Douai in 1734, was for fifteen years intendant at Metz and at Lille before he became Controller of Finance in 1783. When he fell into disfavour in 1787 he fled to England, where he afterwards became one of the most active supporters of the emigration. He afterwards returned to France, where he died in 1802.

enemies are now triumphant. The King of France has touched glory with his foot. M. Necker must have had a strong head to follow so long a stride." Every foreigner of distinction, every prince who passed through Paris endeavoured to make the acquaintance of M. Necker; just as nowadays those strangers who interest themselves in the fortunes of France pay a visit to the members of the government, and to those whom they consider to be the presumptive heirs. M. Necker's drawing-room had become what we should now call an Opposition drawing-room, in which the old frequenters of the Hôtel Leblanc used to meet those enlightened noblemen who had given to M. Necker such warm-hearted assistance. Literary and academical questions were now less debated than used to be the case on former Friday evenings. Events of the day were discussed; the guests lamented that M. Necker's plans should be abandoned; the measures of his successors in office were much criticised; and the master of the house listened now with a more attentive ear than in bygone days, when he used to say, "I beg your pardon?" if a question were addressed to him.

The admiration felt for M. Necker by his contemporaries was due not only to the unworthiness of his successors in office, but also to the manner in which he occupied his leisure hours. We have now become

accustomed to see statesmen turn from politics to literature, and endeavour to employ either in philosophy, in history, or in reading, that time which the changeableness of our institutions has assured to them. But it was then uncommon to see a minister no longer in power busy himself in disinterested studies, but nevertheless working for the welfare of the state which he could no longer serve. It may be said perhaps that M. Necker's labours were not altogether disinterested, for in his *Traité sur l'Administration des Finances* he strove to defend those acts of his own administration which had met with hostile opposition, and to develop those plans for reform which his resignation of office had prevented him from bringing into effect. "M. Necker," as was said spitefully enough by Mme. de Marchais (no doubt after the quarrel), "loves virtue as a man loves his wife, and glory as he loves his mistress." It was love for his mistress, or rather for glory, that prompted M. Necker to undertake this work, in which we may find a clear and complete exposition of the then financial organisation in France. But his other work, *l'Importance des Opinions Religieuses,* in which from a philosophical point of view the arguments and the conclusions drawn may be somewhat vague, but the whole tenor of which is eminently Christian,—this book was written from motives much less personal to himself. M.

Necker's shrewdness showed to him plainly enough how strange were the pretensions unblushingly put forth by his friends the philosophers; they wished to commence their social reforms by destroying all religious creeds, and by giving to the people liberty by throwing down those very barriers which more surely than any others would keep them within just bounds. These same pretensions which we now see asserted more warmly than ever were very strongly opposed by M. Necker. There is a passage in his book which seems as though it were written but yesterday, and which one might use in answering the modern votaries of a lay and independent system of morals: "For some time past we have heard it frequently repeated that we ought to compose a catechism of moral duties, in which religious principles should have no place, antiquated and worn-out ideas which we ought now to put on one side. We should attack these principles to greater advantage if we could succeed in showing that they were useless in helping us to maintain law and order, and if the cold lessons of political philosophy could stand in place of these sublime ideas, which, by the holy tie of religion, join together hearts and minds into the most unspotted system of morality." We may be sure that the formation of this catechism is not an easy matter, for men have been at work upon it for a hundred years, and it is not

yet finished. The fact is plain enough from the very titles of the books that bear upon the question. And in M. Necker we also see the public man who considers what is the influence that religion has upon people's minds, and who becomes indignant when he thinks what are the consolations that men are trying to snatch "from that unfortunate class who in their youth and in their old age are eaten up by the rich, and who are suddenly abandoned when they have no strength left to them but to pray and to weep." But at times he is animated by a thought more truly philosophical, and the care of human welfare inspires him with fine passages in favour of the existence of the divinity and of the perpetuity of our own being. I may perhaps be allowed the following quotation, though it be a little long, in which the author of the *Compte Rendu* speaks warmly in a simple and sincere tone which was not common with men in his time :—

We cannot meditate deeply upon the wonderful attributes of thought; we cannot fix our attention upon the vast empire under its control; we cannot reflect upon the faculty that has been given to it, to lay hold of the past, to bring the future before us, to draw near to it the spectacle of nature and the picture of the universe, and to hold, so to say, in one point the infinity of space and the immensity of time; we cannot consider such a prodigy without reuniting in one great feeling of admiration the idea of an object worthy of such a great conception, and worthy also of him whose wisdom we all adore. But can we discover this object, in the passing breath, in the fleeting moment,

which is our whole life? Can we discover it in a succession of ephemeral apparitions which seem destined only to mark the progress of time? And more especially, can we see it in this general system of destruction, in which must be buried in the memory, both the insensible plant that perishes, which has never known life, and the intelligent man who learns every day the charm of existence? Do not let us so degrade ourselves, our lot in life, and our own nature; let us judge better and hope for better things from him who is unknown to us. Life which is ever perceptible ought not to lead us to everlasting death; the mind, that fruitful source of knowledge and of light, ought not to lose itself in the dark shadows of nothingness; sentiment, this sweet and pure emotion which joins us to others with so much charm, ought not to evaporate as the haziness of a dream; conscience, that rigid observer of our actions, that proud and majestic judge, cannot have been given to us to deceive; and piety and virtue do not vainly raise their eyes towards this model of perfection, the object of their love and of their adoration. There is therefore some magnificent secret behind all that we see; there is some astonishing wonder behind this screen still drawn before us; and everywhere, on every side of us, we see a glimmer of what this secret is. Let us at least cherish the idea of a God—let us not lose our belief in the existence of this Sovereign Master of the world; and as we become convinced of this great thought we shall be able to defend our hopes against all the metaphysical arguments which were before unknown to us.

This work of M. Necker's, which drew from Buffon as he lay on his deathbed a last cry of admiration, was regarded by the world at large more with feelings of respect than of enthusiasm. The conclusions at which he arrived were too antagonistic to the feelings of the society in which he lived, and they contained nothing

that would give pleasure to men in whom listlessness dominated in every philosophical and religious thought. But they did not deny that M. Necker's mind was cast in a much finer mould than that of his political adversaries; and of this superiority no one was more surely convinced than his own daughter. Germaine Necker had not as yet left her father's house, and to her had been confided the secret of the preparation of the work, for it was not known generally among the author's friends; and in her journal, from which I have already extracted a few fragments, she shows her admiration in that energetic manner which, in her girlhood, was no proof against the sincerity of her sentiments:—

My father and I walked out as the evening drew on. The sun was falling, and everything around us was very lovely. Ah! a great man is seen better in the midst of the great wonders of the creation than among the crowd of his fellow-creatures. The analogy degrades him. Whereas, alone of his kind, he seems by his genius to recover again possession of the world, and to lift up man to the highest point given to him to attain. We spoke of the book upon which he was then at work. I thought that he would call it *De l'Existence de Dieu*, but instead it will be *De l'Importance des Opinions Religieuses*. He thinks that this title is more conformable to his former occupations, and seems to indicate more clearly the opinions of a statesman. One must therefore obtain from men their permission to talk to them of eternity in speaking to them of the present, and they would judge to be vain and useless everything unconnected with the soul and with immortality. But what a

fine idea it was of my father's to undertake this work! What a grand beginning, as it seems to me! What a sublime excuse to men, to speak to them of God! What crushing weapons against those who like to ridicule things so much above them! How glorious it is to see by what truths a statesman can free himself from those great interests which once so strongly occupied his mind, and what consolations, as boundless as his thoughts, he can find for himself in his leisure hours. Ah! I see the book. It appears and it disappears immediately, and I am waiting to read it, to find again that which I feel, but which I cannot find words to express.

I fancy that if all our friends were to try to guess upon what work my father is now engaged, not one of them would succeed. M. de Guibert even would not be able to guess it. The idea would seem to him to be a fine one that a great man should lean with all his strength upon that which so many minds have attempted to shake, a man with a very strong love for other men who wishes to find happiness for himself and for them on the other side of the grave. All these ideas taken together might make him fond of the subject; but he is too ambitious, he is too full of life, he feels too strongly those powerful instruments which can move the world, to separate them from the world, and to raise them to that sublime height where genius can find repose. It is there only that genius can find its haven of rest.

Nevertheless Germaine Necker could not dissimulate from herself that these noble studies were not in themselves sufficient to occupy all her father's thoughts; she saw that he often used to look back with feelings of regret to those days when he was actively employed in public business. She became unhappy when she perceived that his strong affection was not powerful enough to satisfy a means of existence that was so dear

to him; though she would confess to herself, with that sincerity which was the great charm in her nature, that she herself would have turned back if she had been obliged to sacrifice her youthful ambition and shut herself up with her father and live with him in solitude.

16th August.

M. de Castries[1] and M. de Lessart[2] came to dine here yesterday. How unhappy such visits do make my father, for he cannot tolerate the society of self-seeking men. I wish somebody would write upon the front of our house, "No lodging here but for those who come back: good inn for the return journey." Must I confess it to myself? Yes, I fear that my father likes nothing that reminds him of that position which he still regrets; but how can he help regretting it when he is so sure of his own capacity. Public opinion gave him every encouragement in his fine career; he was flattered by the glory that came to him because he had made the nation prosperous; he could exercise his genius over a very vast space, the present, the future, France, and all Europe. I had hoped that what he had accomplished would give him a distaste for conversation on public matters. I said to him often enough that after he had taught men all that was in his power, after he had shown them the strength of his mind, he ought to consider himself indebted to them no longer, nor

[1] Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, Marquis de Castries, the victorious general at Clostercamp, was born in 1727. M. Necker, his friend, had proposed him to Louis XVI. as Minister of the Admiralty in 1780. Appointed Marshal of France in 1783, he emigrated in 1791, and afterwards exercised an influential part in the councils of Louis XVIII. while the latter was at Blankenbourg. He died at Wolfenbuttel in 1801.

[2] Antoine de Valdec de Lessart, after having been Maître des Requêtes, was appointed Controller-General in 1790, and Minister of the Interior in 1791. An impeachment was passed against him, and he was massacred at Versailles after the days of September.

let himself be worried because he could no longer exercise his faculties. But as the ideas gradually developed themselves and became clearer in his mind, as he saw more plainly the richness of France and the misfortunes of her people, he felt a torment of a different kind from that suffered by Tantalus. He sees the finest buildings crumble away, and his strong hand cannot stretch itself out far enough to save them. But he conceals these thoughts from himself, and I ought to try and imitate him. He and I both regard his old situation as an unfaithful mistress; we say nothing but ill of her, but if she came back again our language would be very different.

My father was the happiest when at Coppet. There one can breathe an air of independence. All our ambitious ideas appear to me to be small beside the great mountains which seem to touch the heavens. Every one about you is happy; a formidable barrier separates you from France. A country that you have left when you were as yet a child reminds you of the life and the calm of that youthful age. You have left it young, and you return to it at the beginning of old age, and the interval seems to be a dream, that is, it strikes you as strange and foreign. The years before you must seem to you to be like the present moment. When you are young you wish that the future may not be as the present; later on you fear everything of which you are not assured. In Switzerland we were surrounded by men who did recall to my father's mind the ideas of power, they were ignorant of the word and had no desire to learn what it was; in France it forms the whole basis of society. Renown is on every side of you at a certain distance; but those who come near you perceive only the power and the reputation that it brings. The brilliancy of actions or of writing has a very different aspect. In society your former position is injurious to you in the one which you now occupy; a minister out of office is as a woman who is no longer handsome, but who wishes to live with those who did not see her when she was young.

I know very well that we raise ourselves by our aspirations, by our thoughts, above this small circle that surrounds us; we

see above their heads the men of all times and of every country; we see the lustre of glory and of virtue—but I feel that on the top of the Alps we are in the best position for perceiving all these things. Happy retreat for my father, solitude in a free country after he has served a king! How grand it would be if he were again asked to come back and govern France once more! Whatever he might say would be noble. He might either refuse or accept. He would not be like Cincinnatus, at his plough, but nearer to the heavens, and in the country in which man in all his dignity is as free as the air that he breathes. I can understand that my father should not be happy elsewhere, how that elsewhere he is not satisfied with himself. The way of self-seeking men vexes him; the spectacle of unhappy men afflicts him. Noble soul, sublime soul, it was in your retreat, between your wife and your daughter, that you found repose from your own mind.

My father sacrificed to my mother's wishes his very great love for Switzerland; he would have been unhappy in his misfortune, but he is not happy in his success. For myself, I know I am sorry for it; I was mentally afraid that he wished to pass his life in the country. I pray I may have his pardon. I am not yet old enough to be obliged to live for the rest of my life upon the recollections of people and things that I have seen. I am not imagining wild dreams, it is not a love of pleasure that urges me on, but though I love him in my heart I should tremble if we three were for ever to be shut up together. Another moment and perhaps I may follow him into solitude. If through any awful misfortune he found no other connection but myself, I would devote myself to him, I would tear out every other idea from my heart. It would be a great blow to me, but I should make him happier; one moment of his happiness is of more import than the trouble of my whole life. If fresh duties prevented me from doing this I should draw him towards myself. Let me distract my thoughts from such a painful picture. We often torment ourselves in imagining things which most probably will never occur.

In truth, no girl need be likened to Célimène because the thought

> La solitude effraie une âme de vingt ans

is present to her mind. And M. Necker, instead of wishing to close the gates of Coppet upon his wife and daughter, was now endeavouring to bring about the marriage of his only child with M. de Staël. Moreover it might be said, if it were necessary, that M. and Mme. Necker were not concerned only to find a son-in-law who should have all the brilliancy of rank and position, for Prince George Augustus of Mecklenbourg, brother of the reigning duke, had already asked for the hand of their daughter. But in fact, the age of the royal suitor (he was more than forty) and the candid frankness with which he made his application, "because being a younger son, and having been for more than twenty years in the Imperial army, heavy debts had been forced upon him," were not perhaps the qualifications that spoke most strongly in his favour. But if the parents of the girl were likely to be touched by such vain considerations, they might have been flattered at the thought that by this marriage their daughter would become the sister-in-law of the King of England. M. Necker had no hesitation in the matter. He wrote to the prince a gracious letter, excusing himself for declining the honour of his alliance on account of other

engagements "which," he said, "were not yet concluded, but which he could not honourably break off, if his propositions were accepted." The prince withdrew his claim, and a few months later Germaine Necker, as we have already seen, became the wife of the Swedish ambassador.

Mme. de Staël's marriage added fresh brilliancy to the receptions in her mother's drawing-room. Though she lived with her husband at the Swedish Embassy in the Rue du Bac (the street of the famous stream), and though she kept up her house almost in a splendid manner, she spent her evenings generally in the Rue Bergère, and she always went to Saint Ouen in the summer. Her presence gave to the conversation a peculiar animation. She had become the queen of the place, to the detriment of her mother, who was obliged to yield to her the first place. Mme. Necker's best days, we must allow, were beginning to pass away. Some years previously her health had received a heavy shock from which she never completely recovered, and which, though it did not abate the ardour of her sentiments, the vivacity of her mind had become lessened. Her friends, her admirers, Thomas, Buffon, and Diderot, were dead or were dying. The old circle of friends who used to meet at the Rue de Cléry as it grew wider had become changed, and by degrees, Mme.

l'Ambassadrice, as Mme. de Staël was called in her mother's drawing-room, became recognised as the central figure. Political matters, for which Mme. Necker had never felt any strong interest, gained the upper hand over the literary discussions, which with her had always been a favourite pleasure, and all the guests perceived in a vague sort of way that the game was growing too serious to be merely pleasant skirmishes among the wits. In conversation of this kind Mme. de Staël excelled, and she has been equalled by no woman in the art of assimilating to the most important subjects those small details, often trivial enough, which lay at the bottom of all political debate. The drawing-room in the Rue Bergère became in reality Mme. de Staël's drawing-room; it was her influence in place of her mother's that was the chief moving power. In the diplomatic despatches sent by M. de Staël to his sovereign, Gustavus III., the originals of which are in the archives at Stockholm, we have an interesting and faithful account of the state of feeling prevalent in this choice society, immediately before the outbreak of the Revolution.[1] All that part of these despatches

[1] *Unpublished Correspondence of the Baron de Staël Holstein*, published by M. Léouzun le Duc. We must not confound these despatches with the bulletins sent by Madame de Staël to the King, and of which M. Geffroy has published some extracts. Gustavus III. must have been a sovereign peculiarly well informed, for besides these bulletins and despatches from his ambassador, his ambassador also

referring to what was going on in France, was manifestly an abstract of what M. de Staël heard in his father-in-law's drawing-room. Who other than M. Necker's son-in-law could have written to his sovereign in speaking of the French monarchy: "This monarchy differs from despotism only by the influence of public opinion. That is the sole safeguard of the citizens"? Who else would have spoken in these terms of the baneful influence that bad ministers have upon the destiny of a nation?—

We cannot reasonably expect a change in the political government of France that will be useful and permanent both to the country and to its allies until the men who form the King's Council have more regard for the honour of their country and for truth than they have for their own places. I do not doubt that such men may be found, but they will not be employed until after every other means has failed. In the meanwhile we must deplore the evil done by a weak government. It sets an example for a general want of discipline; it quenches the love of patriotism and of honour—sentiments which are the source of great social virtues;—and it substitutes the corruption coming from selfishness and the insatiable thirst for pleasure. In this way bad ministers pave the way for misfortunes of which we cannot foresee the end, and they often render fruitless the labours of a wise prince, because the harm done lasts through a whole generation.

We may be quite sure that neither M. de Staël's predecessor, the Comte de Creutz, nor his colleagues, the

addressed to him private letters, giving him details as to the small matters that went on at court and also in society. The originals of these letters are in the archives at Coppet.

English, or the Austrian ambassadors, made use of such philosophical language in their despatches as did this diplomatist, then only twenty-eight years old; and although M. de Staël was a man not wanting in talent, we may perhaps ask ourselves if this judgment was in fact really his.

The King's councillors, we may perceive, were judged harshly in M. Necker's drawing-room; but the members of the royal family were always spoken of with deference and respect. M. Necker's guests deplored the King's blindness, but they paid justice to the good intentions of a virtuous prince. It was thought that the Queen was the only person capable of "untying the bandage that the courtiers had put round the eyes of the monarch." It is a singular fact, and one that has not been sufficiently noticed, that it was from the world of Versailles and the Trianons, from the small court of Mesdames the King's aunts, or from the court of Monsieur, sometimes even from those who were nearest to the person of Marie Antoinette, that sprang those spiteful rumours, those odious calumnies, which fell so heavily upon the head of the unhappy woman. The liberal party was then inclined to be well disposed towards her. They perceived that beneath her apparent frivolity there lay concealed a greater store of intelligence and of resolution than was given to the King, in spite

of his stern demeanour, and they hoped that when the first outburst of youth had spent itself, this power of resolve would turn to more serious matter, and the Queen would declare herself upon the side of the reformers. And we may see that M. de Staël more than once so expresses himself in his despatches :—

The oftener I have the happiness of seeing the Queen, the more persuaded I am of the excellence of her character. She loves truth, and she will allow that the truth be told her if she is satisfied of the honesty and of the disinterestedness of him who is talking to her. If one speaks with dignity of manner and with frankness, one is sure to please her, even though her own opinions be different. As soon as she perceives flattery and falseness in any one, to that person she takes a strong aversion ; but like every prince upon earth, she cannot, unhappily for humanity, be always upon her guard against the wiles that courtiers use to gain their object, no matter what may be the results.

What must Gustavus III. have thought as he read these somewhat cavalier remarks from his young ambassador, who in his words "every prince upon earth," apparently included his royal sovereign? It may be that this liberty of language was the first cause and origin for the disfavour into which M. de Staël fell a few years later. But still Gustavus III. must have been pleased at the manner in which he went on to speak of the Queen. With reference to the arrest of the Cardinal de Rohan M. de Staël wrote :—

It appears to be certain that MM. de Vergennes[1] and de Calonne are very hostile to the Queen, and that instead of silencing rumours that may be disagreeable to her, they take a pleasure in adding to them fresh stimulus. It is a great pity that the Queen has no statesman to give her good council, for with such a fine disposition she has sufficient strength to follow good advice, but she wants to have it pointed out to her. It seems that those about her do not treat her with very much respect; for at the present moment, for instance, the Polignacs and M. de Vaudreuil[2] are warmly in favour of the Cardinal, and the Comte d'Artois has shown the greatest sympathy for him. I do not find that the people regard the Queen with those sentiments which she ought to inspire in others. Her desire to please has not been successful —not even to the extent that it would have been with any other lady. This may be a proof that in spite of the giddiness of the people of this country they expect to find in their sovereigns eminent virtues, and that they become attached to them only on account of their activity.

In so speaking of the Queen, M. de Staël was no doubt actuated by a recollection of the support that she had given to him at the time of his marriage, and also of the kindness that she had since shown to the young ambassadress. This happened the day when Mme. de Staël was presented at court, on the 31st January, 1786. As she was making the three curtsies exacted

[1] Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, born at Dijon in 1717, of an old family of magistrates, was at one time ambassador at Stockholm; and afterwards, from 1774 to 1787, the year of his death, was Minister for Foreign Affairs.

[2] Louis Philippe Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, born in 1723, died in 1802. In common with the Polignacs he formed part of the small court of Marie Antoinette.

by etiquette, the trimming of her dress, which had not been well adjusted, became unfastened, and the confusion into which she was thrown by this mishap obliged her to omit to make one of the curtsies, probably the last one, which was the most difficult, because, in raising herself, the lady presented always made it appear as though she took hold of the bottom of the Queen's dress to put it to her lips. As Mme. de Staël after the presentation was obliged to be present at a grand dinner given in her honour, at which there were to be eighty people present, she was much embarrassed because of the misfortune that had happened to her dress; but the Queen graciously took her aside into her own private apartment, and talked to her pleasantly as one of her servants was repairing the injury that had been done to the dress. This little incident made some small stir in the world, and very shortly afterwards the following quatrain was in everybody's mouth :—

> Le timide embarrass qui naît de la pudeur,
> Bien loin d'être un défaut, est une belle grâce.
> La modeste vertu ne connait pas l'audace,
> Ni le vice effronté l'innocente rougeur.

Before very long the Queen showed to Mme. de Staël another mark of her favour of a more delicate and more intimate kind. The de Staëls were as yet both young, and they lived at the Embassy in splendour

and luxury. The Queen, who had been concerned in the negotiations for their marriage, knew what the resources of the young household were, and fearing that these were not adequate to meet such a large expenditure, through the medium of M. Necker she consented to give a little friendly advice to the young ambassadress. We may see what this advice was from the following letter from Mme. de Staël to her husband :—

MONDAY, *Saint Ouen.*

I beg of you, my dear friend, to ask Mme. de Simiane to dine with us on Thursday. One lady more will make no difference to our dinner; and, whatever somebody may say, we shall not ruin ourselves. This *somebody* I know is not to be despised. It is in fact the Queen who told my father through M. de Castries that she feared that we should exceed our means, and she begged him to look after us. My father thereupon took advantage of the occasion to give me a lecture, for he was much struck by the warning, and especially he was touched by the Queen's kindness. He will no doubt tell you of it, but he will not speak as sharply to you as he did to me; for like him I always feel a certain embarrassment in saying that I am fond of persons of such high rank. There are so many who make a pretence of liking them. As a matter of fact I have always observed that he has praised her in his own peculiar way, because of her right-mindedness, because of her dignity of thought, and because of her goodness, and that he has repudiated any sort of attack made upon her in his presence; and I have especially noticed that he became sad when he heard it said that she was interested in his favour. The talent of woman lies in minute observation, and I can always tell whom I am fond of.

To-morrow you are going to Versailles; you will give my

compliments to M. de Vergennes.[1] Will you order the dinner? I think that sixteen dishes will be enough; you see that the Queen's advice is beginning to have effect. Adieu, my dear friend.

These kind wishes that the Queen felt for M. Necker and for his daughter, were first disturbed at the time of the public dispute between M. Necker and M. de Calonne. It is well known that in his speech at the opening of the Assembly of the Notables in 1787, M. de Calonne cast a doubt, implicitly at least, upon the truth of the *Compte Rendu*, in stating that the annual deficit was then as much as 110,000,000 francs, and also in endeavouring to prove that when M. Necker went out of office this deficit had already reached the sum of 60,000,000 francs. M. Necker, stung to the quick at finding that his reckoning and that his reputation as an honest man were impugned, solicited from the King the favour of a discussion on the matter before the Assembly of the Notables, and, not able to attain this, in reply to the assertions made by M. de Calonne he published a Minute justifying the truth of his previous statement. The King had signified to M. Necker his wish that he should do nothing, adding that he believed in the accuracy of the *Compte Rendu*, and he became annoyed when he found that his assurance had not proved sufficient to prevent M. Necker from making a

[1] M. Necker and M. de Vergennes were upon very bad terms, and this commission must have been intended as a joke.

public explanation. He therefore sent to M. Necker through the Baron de Breteuil, a *lettre de cachet*,[1] ordering that he should remove to forty leagues from Paris. This measure, which in former days would have appeared to be simple enough, and even looked upon as a mild punishment for disobedience, excited then, the times having become altered, a general cry of dissatisfaction. M. Necker's friends were very violent because he had been ordered to leave Paris in twenty-four hours at a time when his wife was ill, and when his daughter was on the point of being confined. Even those who were indifferent sided with him, and perhaps M. Necker himself looked upon his misfortune more philosophically than did his friends, as we may see by a letter that he wrote to his daughter from Fontainebleau as he was on the way to his place of exile :—

"My dear Minette,

"All things considered, and after having well debated upon your last advice, we shall leave early to-morrow morning for Château Renard, unless anything unforeseen should occur. I think the castle is suitable, because it is inhabited every autumn by two families, the d'Outremonts, and the de Fougerets. I have no idea what the outside aspect may be, I fear your mother's decided taste for good as well as for bad ; but she is full of courage as to the effects of the journey. . . You will hear during the week what has passed ; we have already been informed

[1] Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier, Baron de Breteuil, born in 1733, died in 1807. It was as minister of the King's household that he countersigned this *lettre de cachet*.

by Germaine, and by your letters. They were written hastily, but they were very amusing. But still I have not with me my dear Minette, from whom I shall be separated for a long time, and whom I shall be so anxious to see again. Your dear mother is taking every possible care of her health. I cannot help thinking sometimes that we are hardly treated in being compelled to make this sudden change. I am not thinking of myself, but of my wife who is very ill, and of my daughter, who is as round as a drum. All these things make our exile hard to bear. I have become rather more angry since I have been left to myself, and also since I have felt all the worry of changing my residence without knowing where to go; and again since I recollected that the word *transitory* that I wrote at the bottom of my letter to the Baron de Breteuil had no effect. We shall have time enough to moralise upon all this. It is in the interest of the public that there should be a great compensation, a great counterbalance to all this, otherwise—— But I cannot learn how things are going on, except from you.

The exasperation felt by M. Necker was as nothing to that felt by his daughter. She wrote afterwards, "I cannot describe my condition when I heard this news; it appeared to me to be an act of unexampled despotism. It related to my father, of whose noble and pure sentiments I was so thoroughly convinced. I had as yet no idea of what a government was, and the conduct of the French government appeared to me to be the most revolting injustice." The withdrawal of the *lettre de cachet*, which came at the end of two months, did not suffice to appease her anger, and she wrote to her husband from the Château de Marolles, near Fontainebleau, where she had gone to stay with her parents:—

I thank you, my dear friend, for the letter that you sent me by Mme. de Beauvau; I was a little annoyed because M. de Crillon brought me nothing from you. You see that the queen is not behaving to you any better now than before, for it was natural enough that she should tell you of the withdrawal of the *lettre de cachet*, and that is one of those marks of attention that do not mean very much, and which come easily to her whenever she wishes to please any one. I think, therefore, it is now more necessary than ever that you should keep yourself in the background. But if she asks to see you, speak to her, as we have already agreed, showing a great nobility of sentiment for my father; letting her perceive that the termination of this exile is more important to the queen and to the king than it is to my father. Let the queen see how grieved you are at the coldness and the indifference that she has personally shown to you, and also let her know your own discretion in never speaking of my father before her. I think that what I am now writing, spoken with your ordinary prudence, but at somewhat greater length, and especially in a fine and respectful tone, might have a good effect, if she should wish that you should go to see her. . . You did not reply to my letter as to Fontainebleau. If your own position, and the character of your king had allowed it, I assure you that I should have never set foot again in Versailles after my father's exile. I should have been glad to show my anger, and never to have gone near the place again. But as our position makes such a determined resolution impossible, I think that I am not showing my desire to please the queen by paying my court to her once or twice, and in spending a few days enjoying the hunting and other amusements, which at my age I may indulge in without being suspected of intrigues or of a love for court favour. And also as M. de Montmorin[1] is your minister, I shall like Versailles better this year than when your Vergennes was there. Adieu, my dear friend.

[1] Armand Marc, Comte de Montmorin Saint Hérem, was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs after the death of M. de Vergennes. He was massacred in September, 1792.

As we might have expected, M. Necker's exile was very shortly followed by his return to official life. The situation was every day growing worse. According to Mirabeau's expression: "every one understood that if this game of blind-man's-buff went on much longer there would come a general crash." M. de Staël's despatches to his sovereign gives a true idea of what was then passing in men's minds; he wrote also with animation and with much true insight into things. Nearly a year before the States-General were convened, the word Revolution was whispered,—this word that sounded so strongly in the ears of Louis XVI. upon the morning of the taking of the Bastille. In the month of November, 1778, M. de Staël wrote to Gustavus III.:—

It appears that the parliament is fully decided not to agree to any scheme for lending money without having the promise of the States-General, and money has become so necessary that it may be considered as certain that the preamble will provide that they shall assemble every two years. When this important step has been made, it will, I think, be no longer in the power of the court to suspend the movement working in men's minds, and the notables chosen by the king unlawfully, have nevertheless given sufficient proof of their courage to show what the States-General are now determined to do. I do not know if such a great revolution will be beneficial to this country; but it is worthy of remark that these people are the first in whom the finances of this country have given rise to such very important events, and that one single man (M. de Calonne) will have placed the king under the power of the nation more fully

than had been the case with Louis XIV., after all the misfortunes that happened during the latter years of his reign. We must allow also that men's opinions have become changed. The philosophers have done their work; but more than anything else, the want of consideration that the ministers have shown to the king, have given to his subjects a courage, founded upon his own weakness. It seems to me that, at the present moment, all Europe ought to take a warm interest in the events that are now going on in France, as the political constitution of the kingdom must have its influence upon its outside political relations.

When M. de Staël thus points out the man who has done more harm to the monarchy than did all the wars and the misfortunes of Louis XIV., it is not very difficult to guess who he thought ought to be appointed as his successor, and who might yet be able to repair the evil done. But this opinion was shared not only by the small group of persons around M. Necker, it was shared by the country at large; and Louis XVI. never responded better to the will of the nation than when, through the mediations of the Comte de Mercy he proposed to M. Necker to come back into the Control Office. In this second writ in favour of M. Necker we find none of those restrictions which were put into the first; it would seem rather that in drawing out this writ there was a manifest intention to show to him every mark of confidence :—

Louis, by the Grace of God, King of France and Navarre, to our beloved and trusty Sieur Necker, sends greeting.

The place of General Controller of our Finances, which was

occupied by the Sieur Lambert, having become vacant by his resignation, we have thought we could not make a better choice than by selecting you as the head of a department so important to the welfare of our kingdom. The proofs that you have already given to us of zeal for the good of our service, persuade us that you will worthily fulfil the trust with which we honour you. Guided by these and other causes, we declare, ordain, and appoint you to be the Chief Director of our Finances; to render account of them to us after you have entered into and exercised your voice and opinion in our Royal Council of Finance. We order that you may enjoy and make use of the said commission with benefit to the honour, authority, and power belonging to it relating to our government of Finance.

M. Necker's nomination was hailed with one long cry of joy from one end of France to the other. Those who were afterwards his strongest opponents in the Constituent Assembly were then the first to welcome his appointment; and it may be perhaps curious to read the following letter written by the hot-headed abbé Maury,[1] who before long shot forth at M. Necker all the shafts of his bitter and incisive eloquence :—

SAINT BRICE, 11*th September.*

I was one of the first, madam, and certainly one of the most sincere of those who rushed to congratulate you as soon as I learnt the joyful news which I had been expecting so long, and which I had dared so often to predict to you. It was impossible then to distinguish oneself by any expressions of delight. I respected the embarrassment into which you were thrown. I

[1] Jean Siffrein Maury, whose position in the Constituent Assembly and afterwards is sufficiently well known, had long been one of the frequenters of the Hôtel Leblanc.

thought only of my own discretion, and I left Paris at a time when the public asserted its own dignity—a thing which does not often happen. I should have contented myself with speaking only of yourself and of the great man of whom you are the worthy half without troubling you more with my congratulations, and I was making up my mind not to pay my court to you until All Saints' Day; but it is not possible for one to follow a plan so sublime as this. M. Necker's splendid work,[1] which I have just read with so much respect and admiration, will no longer allow me to maintain an attitude of dignity towards a minister whose glory and whose genius will make the perpetual happiness of my life. It is the triumph of virtue, of rhetoric, and of eloquence. Figures have never spoken so plainly, no one has ever raised himself to this height by showing his courage and his opinions. M. Necker could not have written in another tone, he could not have expressed himself more properly if he had known that his apology would have been followed so quickly by his entry into the Council. His recall was like the recall of Camillus. Be sure to tell him, madam, that after these public acclamations he can no longer stoop to consider his unworthy enemies, nor even to believe that any one can now be hostile to him. No, he cannot now recollect those unhappy creatures who have become so disgraced in the eyes of the public. I can forgive them all, even M. de Calonne himself, for he has given us this great masterpiece. Let his name be no longer spoken before you but with gratitude. It is not in Cicero's presence that we need speak evil of Antony, of Verres, and of Catiline. I should have great pleasure in giving full play to my feelings in this letter, but you would not have time to read what I said. The only way that remains to me to converse with you is to clap my hands. Accept, madam, the true homage of my attachment and of my respect.

I do not know what impression this letter produced

[1] M. Necker had then printed an answer to the attacks made upon him by M. de Calonne in the form of a second Minute, but this was not in reality published until after his re-entry into office.

upon M. Necker, for we may be sure that his wife showed it to him. But he must have been more deeply touched by the following, addressed to him in the name of the community by the Superioress of the Ursuline Convent at Saint Germain en Laye.

MONSEIGNEUR,

With heartfelt pleasure I respond to the desire expressed by the members of my community that I should tell you of the joy they share in common with the whole universe, which renders justice to your intellect, to your heart, and to your integrity. Although our position does not allow us to put ourselves in the foreground, we are nevertheless citizens, and we have our part in the public happiness. When you are at the head of affairs prosperity will come back to us. Every one is happy because they can confidently believe in your sense of justice, in the goodness of your heart, and in the sentiments of humanity with which your heart is already filled. The fact of your appointment has created a feeling of joy everywhere, it has calmed people's minds, and has made them think that they can once more be contented. I take the respectful liberty to assure you, Monseigneur, that our good wishes are very sincere, believing firmly, as we do, that the greatness of your mind and of your good qualities are well known. We appreciate them, and we bless the Lord for calling you back and for satisfying the desire of every subject in the kingdom to which we also belong. We hope, Monseigneur, that you will accept this homage, and the ardent prayers that we will not cease to make to God for everything that relates to your illustrious person.

It would have been very pardonable in M. Necker if he had allowed his head to be turned by such strong marks of public sympathy; but he was very far from

feeling the same full confidence that was expresssd by the outside world. "Why did they not give me," he said, "the eight months of the Archbishop of Sens? Now it is too late." Future events proved the truth of this prediction, and those who were really anxious for his honour might have wished that instead of returning to power, he had died like Turgot in opposition and out of favour with the Court.

CHAPTER VII.

M. NECKER A SECOND TIME IN OFFICE.

THE second part of M. Necker's political career has not enriched the archives at Coppet with as many documents as the first. When, in 1798, the soldiers of the Directory invaded the Canton of Vaud, M. Necker, from very honourable motives, looked over all his papers and burnt "everything," as he said, "that might compromise anybody;"—or, in other words, he burnt all those papers that would be to us now the most interesting. Those that he left throw no new light upon the events in which he was personally concerned. I can therefore do no more than pass over these events very rapidly, as it is not my intention either to discuss or to judge that line of conduct which M. Necker thought well to adopt. I will, however, make one remark: that between those who accuse M. Necker of having either through incapacity or by treachery provoked the misfortunes attending the

French Revolution, and those who attempt more or less timidly to defend him, the odds are not altogether equal; for it is always easy to point out the advantages that would have accrued from the line of conduct which was not followed. It does not require now any very great intelligence to perceive that M. Necker was imprudent when he allowed the double representation to the third party, and that to the well-known formula put forth by Sieyès, *What is the third party? Nothing. What ought it to be? Everything*—one might theoretically reply: The third party ought to be neither nothing nor everything; it ought to be something. But it would be less easy to show that a minister, brought into power by the tide of reform that was gradually making its way, could bring himself to refuse this concession at a time when one of the King's brothers had publicly declared himself in its favour, and that the Queen had at last come round and become a partisan of a system that had been adopted in different parts of the country, as, for instance, in Languedoc. Nor should we now show ourselves to be very clever were we to ridicule the somewhat credulous enthusiasm of those who dreamt that there would be a peaceful transformation from the administrative monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, or if we were to say that concessions such as those made by the King and his ministers must necessarily

bring with them the death-blow to royalty. We ought rather to show that in reply to the movement for reform it was possible for Louis XVI. to assume the manners of Louis XIV., and for M. Necker to act with the firm determination of Richelieu. Doubtless the responsibility is very great of those who have imprudently overthrown a government when they did not really desire its downfall, and of those who did not offer their assistance soon enough. But what are we to say of those who in the Constituent Assembly constantly joined their votes to those of the Jacobins in the hope that good might come out of evil, or of those who on the other side of the frontiers took part in these provocations, of which the danger fell upon heads other than their own. In fact, I can see but one distinguishing feature between them; and that is that the first were sometimes ingenuous enough to confess their faults, but that the confessions of the others were never given, and they never opened their mouths or took up a pen but to vilipend their adversaries.

Among the many reproaches brought against M. Necker, there is one which I must allow to be well founded. Malouet accuses him of having come before the States-General without any preconceived plan, and that he waited to learn what were their ideas before he made known his own. In her *Considérations sur*

la Révolution Française, Mme. de Staël endeavours to explain why M. Necker scrupulously abstained from infringing upon rights which he thought ought to belong not to him, but to the representatives of the nation. But this argument, which may have satisfied the daughter's affection for her father, dissimulates altogether the weak side of M. Necker's nature. When the time came for him to make an important decision he was irresolute; and this was in a great measure due to that sagacity of mind which showed to him the advantages and the disadvantages of the matter in question, but he had not also the firmness of character to throw into the scales at the right moment that decision which would conclusively turn the balance. A few years later, when Bonaparte's commanding figure was attracting attention everywhere, M. Necker especially admired in him "that proud force of will which saw everything, ruled everything, and which could move onward or stop short at pleasure. This is the all-important quality necessary to govern a great empire; men learn to regard this will as an order of nature, and all opposition ceases." May it not be in this case, as happens very often, that M. Necker admired in Bonaparte that quality which he knew to be most wanting in himself? But we need not therefore conclude that if M. Necker had been endowed with that proud force

of will he would have been able to see everything, to rule everything, and that all opposition would have ceased before his will as though it had been so ordained by nature. We should also be obliged—and this would be a difficult matter—to join to this force of will in M. Necker the person of the unhappy monarch, in whom the excess of misfortune developed still more strongly his moral grandeur. And it is probable that in this M. Necker would not have been more successful than was Marie Antoinette—whose unhappy end we all know—at a later date, for it is to be feared that the King would have sometimes put his veto against the decision of his minister. On this point Malouet relates a curious anecdote, and one that is little known. The story is supposed to have taken place a few weeks before that which happened in October. Malouet and several other influential members of the States-General had proposed to M. Necker and to M. de Montmorin, who were then ministers, to get the Constituent Assembly to vote that they should hold their sittings at a distance of more than twenty leagues from Paris. They thought that they were sure of a majority in the Assembly; the ministers had given their assent to Malouet's proposition, and it was agreed that he should meet them that evening after the Council had risen from their sitting, and that they should then report to him the King's

decision. At midnight Malouet goes to M. de Montmorin's residence, and after having waited there for a long time M. Necker arrives, wearing an embarrassed look, and tells him that the proposition was not acceded to by the Council. Malouet cries out at this, and insists upon knowing why and wherefore, for he feared that the resolution would be attended with fatal results. M. Necker at last says to him: "Monsieur, if you would know the whole truth, I must begin by saying that our office is often an ungracious one. The King is very good, but it is difficult to bring him to give a decision. His Majesty was tired. He slept the whole time that the Council was sitting. We were in favour of moving the Assembly, but the King, when he awoke, said 'No,' and then retired. You may well imagine that we are as much annoyed as you are, and that our embarrassment is very much greater."

Another accusation has been brought against M. Necker, which does not seem to me to be so well founded. It is that he allowed himself to become infatuated with his popularity to such an extent that he could not see all the difficulties of the task that he had undertaken, and that he let matters go their own way, reckoning upon his own prestige to regulate them at some future opportunity. I do not think that this accusation can be justified if we view M. Necker's conduct

at all impartially. No doubt, when he came back into office, he was very well aware of his own popularity, and that this popularity placed him in a much stronger position, and allowed to him a greater independence of action than when he entered the ministry for the first time. But he knew that a great reform movement was taking place, and he did not hide from himself how difficult it would be to direct its steps; and the cold prudence of his first speech (for this was a reason why it was so badly received) before the States-General is a proof that he was endeavouring to consider all things carefully. When he asked those representatives of the nation, who had then come together for the first time, and who were boiling over with proud impatience, "not to show themselves to be envious of the times, to allow him to do something, and not to think that the future could break off all connection with the past," he was giving to them sage counsel against that fatal tendency which in part destroyed the work done by the Constituent Assembly, and also against an evil of which the latter-day France cannot rid herself: a feeling of disdain, of blind hatred for the past, which after all has bequeathed many good things to the country, and is full of joyful recollections. If he had at first deceived himself his illusions must have soon been dispelled when he saw the passionate violence which was directed

against him from all sides. The Marquis de Ferrières [1] relates in his *Memoirs* that a few days before the taking of the Bastille, the Comte d'Artois met M. Necker as he was going into the council chamber, stopped him, shook his fist at him, and said: "Where are you going to, wretched foreigner? Ought you to be in the Council, you upstart commoner? Go back at once into your village, or I shall make an end of you." When passions such as these burst forth from the natural supporters of royalty against the minister who had to defend the prerogatives of the executive against all the Assembly, it was easy for him to predict that he could not make way against the combined force of so many adversaries. And when, on the 17th of July, 1789, M. Necker received the letter in which Louis XVI. so imprudently told him he was no longer wanted, the minister showed by his conduct and by his language that he looked upon this discharge as a most fortunate circumstance. Those rash-minded men who had urged this resolution upon the King without having any new scheme of their own, endeavoured to get M. Necker safely lodged in the Bastille, so that he might not stir up the people to insurrection. But the King, who had always a just

[1] We want a testimony as trustworthy as that of the Marquis de Ferrières, who sat upon the Right benches, to make us believe that the Comte d'Artois, known for his urbanity and for his pleasant manner, should have used words such as those now attributed to him.

appreciation of M. Necker's character, pledged himself that the unfortunate minister would not endeavour to cause any disorder that might be prejudicial to the kingly office. In this Louis's confidence was not ill-placed.

It is well known that M. Necker was seated at his own dinner-table when he received the letter from the King, and the order for his exile. He put the letter in his pocket without betraying any emotion, and continued to join in the conversation. When he had risen from table, he took Mme. Necker aside and told her of the order he had just received; and they both, without waiting to change their clothes, and without saying anything to their daughter—for M. Necker probably feared that in her grief she would commit some indiscretion—got into their carriage and were conveyed to the nearest stage where they could change horses. From there, without halting, they continued their journey into Belgium, for this was the nearest frontier line. At Brussels M. Necker recollected that upon the demand of MM. Hope, the great bankers in Amsterdam, he had pledged with his own private fortune the payment of a large consignment of corn intended for the provisioning of Paris. Fearing that the news of his dismissal from office would hinder expedition of the merchandise, and that the want of food would cause

some disturbance in the town, he immediately wrote to MM. Hope, saying that he would still continue his pledge, and that he had left in the treasury two millions of francs wherewith to answer for the guarantee. Dating from this first ministerial crisis, which ended in so tragic a manner, very many ministers went in and out of office; but we shall find it difficult to point to one who took such precautions in favour of his own recall to power.

But these precautions were all in vain, and at Bâle M. Necker was met by his old first clerk Dufresne de Saint Léon, who brought to him the celebrated declaration of the States-General which was voted upon the motion of M. de Lally.[1] Dufresne de Léon brought also a letter written by the King himself to M. Necker, and which ended as follows: "As you left you spoke of your attachment for me; the proof that I ask of you is the greatest that you can give me." It is not true, therefore, as has been said upon the strength of the piquancy of an anecdote, that this letter was given to M. Necker by Mme. de Polignac, who was

[1] Throphime Gérard, Marquis de Lally Tollendal, was the son of the unfortunate Lally put to death in 1766, and whose name he succeeded in keeping before the public. He had true eloquence, though he was rather given to tears. He was later one of the best friends of Mme. de Staël, and was constantly at Coppet. It was he whom she called *the fattest of sensitive men.* He died in 1830.

herself flying away from the disturbance and from the hostile public opinion.[1] But it is true that chance brought it about, that she and M. Necker met each other at Bâle, at the old inn, *The Three Kings,* where so many travellers less well known have since found a lodging, and in this inn they both had an interview. M. Necker naturally enough wished to know how matters were going on in Paris; Mme. de Polignac, on her side, was not sorry to learn what were the views held by M. Necker. A mutual curiosity gained the upper hand over a mutual distrust. But this last meeting must nevertheless have been a strange one between the minister and the favourite who had been a party to the two under-currents that had been so long struggling the one against the other in the court of Louis XVI. Each fully believed that the other was responsible for all the misfortunes that they both agreed in predicting would happen; and Mme. de Polignac had to extend all her pleasantness of manner, and M. Necker to show all his affability of disposition, in order to maintain the conversation within the bounds of ordinary courtesy.

M. Necker did not deceive himself as to the gravity

[1] Yolande Martine Gabrielle de Polastron, at first the Comtesse Jules, afterwards Duchesse de Polignac, was born in 1749. She was appointed instructress to the children of the royal family in 1782; she died at Vienna in 1794.

of the situation, and his answer to the King (of which the original is preserved in the national archives) betrays none of those signs which show a man to have become over-triumphant at his own victory :—

I was enjoying the repose for which I longed after so much anxiety, when I received the letter with which your Majesty has honoured me. I will return to receive your Majesty's orders, and to judge at a lesser distance, if, in fact, my indefatigable zeal and my unreserved attention can again be of assistance to your Majesty. I think your Majesty wishes that I should come because I know the value of your Majesty's assurance and good faith; but I beg also, that your Majesty will believe, upon my word, that all those honours so tempting to men who have risen to high places, have no longer any charm for me, and that without a feeling of virtue worthy of the good opinion of the King, I would rather seek in retirement that love and that sympathy which I shall ever keep for the honour and for the happiness of your Majesty.

At Bâle, the 23rd of July (the day when the King's orders were delivered to me).

If this letter, written somewhat in an official tone, does not afford a complete guarantee for M. Necker's sincerity, the open and friendly way that he wrote to his brother on the following day will be sufficient to convince even the most incredulous minds :—

BÂLE, *July* 24, 1789.

I do not know where you are, my dear friend, as I have not heard from you of late. I arrived here on Monday the 20th of this month, and I have fancied every day that I should see you because you would have come this way when you learned that I was going from Brussels, through Germany, into Switzerland. I

went on before Mme. Necker, as she had M. de Staël with her as her companion. We crossed Germany without mishap under false names. I saw Mme. Necker and my daughter yesterday, who bore the journey better than I had expected. M. de Saint Léon arrived here a few hours before them; he had inquired for me at Brussels, and had afterwards followed me in my track. He brought me a letter from the King and from the States-General, begging me to return to Versailles to take my old place. These demands have made me unhappy; I was gaining rest and I was enjoying my leisure. But this rest would not have given me a clear and quiet mind, if I had been able to reproach myself with having lacked courage, and if people had said, or thought, that I could have prevented this or that misfortune. I shall therefore return into France, but as a victim of the regard that is paid to me. Mme. Necker feels this even more strongly than I do, and our change of plans is an act of resignation for both of us. Ah! Coppet, Coppet! I shall perhaps soon have good reason to regret you. But we must submit to the cares of necessity, and to the events of incomprehensible destiny. Everything in France is in a state of commotion; disorder and sedition has just broken out in Strasbourg. It seems to me that I am being led into the whirlpool. Adieu, my dear friend.

If M. Necker had continued his journey into Switzerland, says the author of *Souvenirs d'un Officier des Gardes-Françaises*, who was extremely hostile towards him, "he might have made himself pass for a great man who could have prevented the Revolution." If this be true, ought we not therefore to respect him; because of his conscientious feeling of duty which allowed him to be led into the whirlpool. If he was as infatuated with his own popularity as some would have us believe, some exultation might well have been excused

in him, when he saw a whole people up in arms when they heard of his discharge, and then afterwards prepare to light bonfires when they heard of his return to power. M. Necker never received such very strong marks of the public enthusiasm as upon his journey from Bâle to Paris, and after his re-entry into the ministry. There are in the archives of Coppet two huge bundles of papers containing the addresses sent to him by the various municipalities in the large and in the small towns of France. I will select one at random which was sent by the people in a small hamlet in Brittany:—

MONSEIGNEUR,

Pray accept the assurance of our gratitude, and of our love. We offer it to you with unbounded confidence. Your return will fill our hearts with joy, after we have suffered from the most frightful distress. A fearful mourning was cast over France, and we were being robbed of the happy days that your intelligence and your virtue had promised to us. Your presence, Monseigneur, will dissipate this cloud. Remain with us, make us happy; do not fear the attacks of envy. They have been shattered by the patriotic zeal which your great mind has spread over France. At the feet of Louis XVI., and surrounded by citizens, who can dare to attack you? Remain with him for our happiness, and also for the glory of the monarch. Enjoy a position that you only can occupy. Such a place is assigned to you as was that of Sully by the side of Henri IV. We are, with profound respect, Monseigneur, your very humble and very obedient servants,

THE INHABITANTS OF RHUIS IN BRITTANY.

How did it happen that this great popularity disappeared so rapidly that in September, 1790, M. Necker

retired from office, unnoticed, amid the multitude of events that were then happening? It was because of the conscientious, daily, and indefatigable resistance with which he opposed, foot by foot, the mania for disorganisation with which the Constituent Assembly was besotted; it was because of the independence of his language, and his opposition to the popular caprice of this horde of men, who, intoxicated with their power, had become as impatient of truth as the most despotic of absolute monarchs. There is no period in M. Necker's political career that is more obscure than these fourteen months, and there is also no period that does him more honour because of the constant battle, against hope and without reward, which he fought against those popular measures of which he saw clearly enough the fatal and the sad results. This "upstart commoner," to use the expression of the Comte d'Artois, endeavoured to prevent the unjust consequences that would arise from those hasty resolutions passed on the night of the 4th of August; and in a Minute that he published he exposed all the ignorant folly there was in abolishing the titles. This republican (from the right side of this assembly he was accused of secret plans for the foundation of a republic) in firm language, more than once, brought to the recollection of the members what were the indispensable prerogatives of the executive power; and if he pronounced in

favour of the suspensive *veto* against the absolute *veto*, it was because he thought (and was he afterwards proved to have been in the wrong?) that in the face of a single assembly an arm put into the hands of a sovereign so weak as was Louis XVI. might end by turning very much to his prejudice. This Protestant endeavoured to save the clergy from unjust spoliation, and to assure to its body a suitable endowment. This courtier of popularity condemned the publication of the *Red Book*, which contained the registry of the old secret expenses of royalty, and took upon himself the responsibility for acts in which he had no share. And what encouragement did he receive for those efforts which, without having the ascendency of genius, he tried to effect merely in the name of common honesty and right feeling? His attempts at resistance provoked clamour on the benches on the left, and excited sarcasm from the members on the benches on the right. It was especially to this sarcasm that M. Necker and his adherents were susceptible; for it seemed to them, and with some reason, that the efforts made by the King's minister ought to find from the defenders of royalty a more constant support. Once when the *aristocrats* (to use the language of the times) had refused to listen to a Minute that M. Necker had written, Mme. de Staël wrote to her husband saying that she left the chamber as indignant as she was sorrowful, and that she

thought she was going to be ill. In point of fact, M. Necker was not allowed to use against his opponents all the force of arguments which he could employ, if not with eloquence, at any rate with facility to himself. Ministers were forbidden from mounting the tribune, and against the power of the rostrum M. Necker had no other resource left open to him but to write Minutes, which the next day were handed over without a possibility of further reply to the sophisms of a captious contradiction, and aganist which very often were hurled all the eloquence of Mirabeau.

We all know what was the unfortunate issue of the interview that Malouet brought about between Mirabeau and M. Necker. "What are your propositions, sir?" asked the minister, not very wisely. "My proposition, sir," the orator replied, "is to wish you good day." Mirabeau at once rushed out of the room and went to Malouet, saying, "Your minister is a fool; he will hear of me again." From that moment Mirabeau lost no opportunity of throwing discredit upon M. Necker or of trying to thwart his plans. But his hatred began before this, if we may believe the curious but not very trustworthy testimony of Cerutti.[1] This ex-Jesuit had been Mirabeau's friend, and had quarelled with him, but never-

[1] Joseph Antoine Joachim Cerutti, born at Turin in 1738, died in 1792.

theless he pronounced his funeral eulogium in 1791, in the Church of Saint Eustache. But in the meanwhile he had offered his services to M. Necker; and being quite disinterested, as I would believe, he always took care to let Mme. Necker know what was being said in public about her husband. Cerutti expresses himself in the following terms as regards the man whose colleague he had once been, and of whom he was one day going to be the panegyrist:—

. . . . Do not doubt, madam, the horrible Mirabeau has ever been at the head of those underground miners. He led them through the dark passages; he stimulated them in all their manœuvres; if he did not furnish them with money, he found for them the saltpetre. He wished to undermine the throne, the treasury, but first of all M. Necker. During my short and imprudent connection with this demoniac I had a dispute with him as regards M. Necker. He got up in a fury, and thumping down his fist upon the chimney with terrible force, he exclaimed: "I will throw down your idol in the face of the whole nation." I answered coldly, "Your blow has not thrown down the chimney, and your rage will not throw down the ministry of France." The madman stormed with rage; his livid forehead was covered with white perspiration, that looked like the foam of a tiger. He wiped his brow, sat down, and with a convulsive smile he said to me: "M. Necker has slandered Calonne, and ruined Panchaud. I wish that his reputation be one day lower than that of Calonne, and his fortune meaner than that of Panchaud. I will follow him to Versailles, to Geneva, in his machinations, in his writings. . . . Unless," he added, cooling himself a little, "unless he allows the double representation to the third estate." This was at the end of 1788. M. Necker allowed the double representation. Thereupon I stupidly wrote to the thief Mirabeau,

who had wit enough to draw me on, to falsify and to publish this silly correspondence. From that time I knew the monster from head to foot, and I saw plainly that unless he was exterminated everything would soon be exterminated by him.

M. Necker could not long withstand such sharp attacks from both parties. In one of his minutes he announced his intention of retiring. This announcement was received in the chamber in absolute and premeditated silence. The King, who, when he had urged him to come back, appealed to his devotedness and to his service, in which his popularity had been spent, now allowed him to go away without giving him one mark of his personal sympathy. M. Necker on his way back to Switzerland was obliged to return through the same provinces which had congratulated him upon his re-entry into office. He now found people actuated with very different sentiments, but he was not surprised at the change. A few days before the 14th of July, as he was accompanied by the crowd home to where he lodged, he said to his friends: "You see this great ovation the people are making in my honour. Well! very probably in a fortnight they will be throwing stones at me." The change had not taken place in a fortnight, but in fifteen months or thereabouts. In many places he found the common people in a state of uproar, because of those idle rumours, which (as we saw clearly enough a few

years back) obtain credence during times of trouble among the people of that nation which boasts of being the most intelligent of all nations upon the face of the earth. As he travelled people shouted after him: "He is taking with him the money belonging to the people." At Arcis sur Aube he was detained by the municipality, and in order to obtain his release he was obliged to make an appeal to the National Assembly. To her father's petition Mme. de Staël added the following letter, which she addressed to the Baron de Jessé, then president of the Assembly:—[1]

11*th September*, 1790.

I ask you as a favour, sir, to make the Assembly consider this morning the question of my father's arrest. It is necessary to his health that this debate should not be delayed. This is the only request that I make. I address myself, sir, to you personally. Your reputation inspires me with confidence. I should not mention my father's name to any one, allow me to say so, whom I did not think worthy to hear it. I have the honour to be, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant.

More fortunate than the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, the son of the kind-hearted Duchesse d'Enville, who, in circumstances very similar, was massacred under his mother's eyes at Gisors, M. Necker obtained his release;

[1] The original of this letter is in the national archives. As we know, the Assembly used to appoint a new president once every month.

and after a fresh halt at Vesoul, he continued his journey, making short stages on account of the ill-health of his wife. Early in October they reached Coppet, where Mme. de Staël soon joined them, and there we shall see them again once more, and be obliged also to bid them farewell.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HISTORY OF COPPET.

It was in 1784 that M. Necker became the possessor of the property and castle of Coppet, after he had thought of buying Ferney, which Voltaire was endeavouring to sell. There were many circumstances attaching to Coppet that give to the castle sufficient notoriety to allow me to run quickly over the history of its successive proprietors. It was constituted in 1335, by the dismembering of the important seignory of Commugny, upon which all the inhabitants of the surrounding country were dependent, and the castle was built in 1457 by that crafty and intriguing Comte Pierre de Savoie; who was called *le petit Charlemagne* by his contemporaries, and who, of all his ambitious race, was the first to make his power felt in the Canton of Vaud. After it had been enfeoffed to the Comtes de Gruyère, the property of Coppet was erected into a barony by the Duc Charles in 1484; and the different owners therefore possessed

the right of bearing the title of Baron de Coppet, a privilege of which M. Necker often availed himself in public documents, and especially in the deed of contract of his daughter's marriage. In the sixteenth century the Canton of Vaud was much troubled by all the vicissitudes of the religious wars and by the struggles that were going on between the house of Savoie and Their Excellencies at Berne. The barony of Coppet changed hands several times, and it was completely burned down (with the exception of some offices under-ground which still subsist) by the Bernese army, who called themselves *l'armée des gentilshommes de la Cuiller*.[1] At the beginning of the seventeenth century the barony was bought by François de Bonne, Duc de Lesdiguières,[2] the king's lieutenant-general in Dauphiné, but he soon became tired of it; and after

[1] The *Confrèrie des gentilshommes de la Cuiller* was an association which the gentlemen of the Canton of Vaud had formed among themselves, with the intention of reconquering Geneva and restoring it to her suzerain, the Duc de Savoie. Their strange-sounding title had been given to them after a banquet at which one of them had cried: "As true as I hold this spoon, we will swallow Geneva." From the time of the taking of this oath, all the members of the brotherhood were bound to wear round their neck either a gold or a silver spoon. The brotherhood did in point of fact attack Geneva. But a Bernese army came to the rescue of the town, and set fire to the castles belonging to the gentilshommes de la Cuiller. It was in this way that Coppet was burned.

[2] François de Bonne, Duc de Lesdiguières, born in 1543, was the head of the Calvinist party in Dauphiny, and was one of the most faithful supporters of Henri IV. He died in 1626.

many purchases and sales, the land and the castle fell into the hands of the old family of the Comtes de Dohna, who, of the many proprietors of Coppet, were the only people who left behind them any trace of their ownership.

The Comtes de Dohna belonged to an illustrious German family who took their name from the Castle of Dohna, near Dresden, and of whom there are some members still living in Prussia. They adopted the title of Burgrave and Count of the Holy Empire. The Count Frederic de Dohna, the purchaser of Coppet, was governor of the principality of Orange, enclosed within the earldom of Venaissin, which belonged to the Prince of Nassau. For more than half a century the Comtes de Dohna maintained throughout the country a princely position, and they so acted towards the Republic of Geneva. They had their own particular tribune in the Cathedral of St. Peter, as though they were petty sovereigns. In the month of May, 1688, a daughter was born to the Countess de Dohna, and the Count asked that the seignory would present his child to the baptismal font; and this favour being granted, no doubt because of the services rendered by the Count to the Republic when he accepted the command of a small army collected together against the Duke of Savoy, the Magnificent Little Council decided that "Monsieur,

the first syndic, accompanied by some of the members of the Council, should go to Coppet on the small frigate belonging to the seignory, to perform the duties of godfather according to the customary usage, and also that a gold medal of the value of twenty-five pistoles should be struck off and be presented by Monsieur, the first syndic, to the Countess, on behalf of the seignory, and that a large provision of sweetmeats and sugar-plums should also be taken and presented." The councillors sent by the seignory were, so say the registers of the Council, "very heartily welcomed and entertained by M. le Comte and Madame la Comtesse, who expressed to them their great gratitude, and assured them of their constant affection;" and the little girl, who was presented to the baptismal font by the seignory, received the name of Espérance Madeleine *Genève.*

A reminiscence more interesting than that of the baptism of the little Genève, and which also relates to the Comte de Dohna's ownership of Coppet, is that Bayle,[1] the author of the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, stayed there for some time within its walls. Bayle at that time was twenty-three years old, and he had already abjured the Calvinistic religion professed

[1] Pierre Bayle, born at Carlat in the earldom of Foix, in the year 1647, died in 1706 at Rotterdam.

by his parents, and had afterwards embraced it again. His parents therefore judged it expedient, by way of training his volatile principles of faith, to send him to Geneva. But Bayle found that living at Geneva was too costly for his means. He did not wish to accept the position of a second-class schoolmaster which was offered to him, because, as he said in a letter to his father, "those sort of men are treated as though they were the very antipodes of true merit; they are perpetually held up to ridicule, so that a man ought to have the teeth of Saturn if he wants to crunch that stone." He accepted, however, an offer made to him by the Comte de Dohna as tutor to his two children; though it appears that this appointment was not very remunerative,—and in this way he became established at Coppet.

Bayle had other occupations than those of teaching the young Counts Latin, history, geography, and even heraldry—a science in which he confesses himself to be very ignorant. He was also employed as secretary to the Count de Dohna himself; at one time to write for him trifling letters; at another the Count, who prided himself upon his military knowledge, made him look through the ancient authors to find "the real Latin words of the different grades in the army as they are now called." In a letter dated from Coppet, Bayle adds,

that "this was not always an easy matter for one of very small understanding, for I did not notice that they had all this apparatus of subaltern officers that we have nowadays, and I find it very difficult to say *sergeant* in Latin without using a paraphrase. But this is what the Count requires." We need not, therefore, be astonished that Bayle, who was kept very hard at work and received but small payment, left Coppet in the month of May, 1674. But we may remark as characteristic of the indifference which men in the seventeenth century had for the beauties of nature, that we find nowhere in Bayle's works, nor in his correspondence, any signs of appreciation of the lakes and mountains among which he had lived during some few years of his youth. In the many letters that he wrote from Coppet, there is not one in which there is a single line giving any description of the scenery, or which might not have been written equally well from any one of the flat districts either in France or in Germany. And in the castle itself there is nothing left to show that he had once lived there; and though it might be interesting to point out to visitors the room which Bayle had occupied, this would not, in truth, be possible except by means of one of those subterfuges of which we find everywhere so many instances.

The castle of Coppet descended from Frederic, Comte

de Dohna, to Alexander, his son, who was one of Bayle's pupils. But after he had retained for some years the possession of his property, he sold it in 1713 to the Baron Sigismond d'Erlach, a Prussian by birth, and a colonel in the Cent-Suisses. At the end of two years Coppet again changed hands, and after much selling and buying, the barony, which as it seems was not regarded with very strong feelings of affection by any of its owners, at last came into the hands of noble Pierre Germain de Thelusson, who at one time was M. Necker's partner in business, and from him M. Necker bought the property. At the time of this last sale the Canton of Vaud had been for nearly a hundred years past under the dominion of Their Excellencies at Berne, and Their Excellencies intervened in each one of these different contracts of sale to assert their authority by making conditions which, as we shall see, were far from liberal. In the deed of sale drawn up in favour of the Baron d'Erlach the act of investiture is given by the treasurer of the Canton of Vaud in the name of Their Excellencies at Berne upon the two following conditions:—

1st.—To be a good, loyal, and true vassal of Their Excellencies of Berne, our superiors and sovereign seigneurs, to maintain and uphold their authority, honour, and property, and to do nothing that will bring to them injury, dishonour, or damage, and as long as he shall be under their commands to obey their wishes and behests, the ordinances and statutes that they have established,

or those that they may establish, both as regards the government of this State or of the reformed religion and ecclesiastical discipline, without contravening or permitting anything that may go to the contrary.

2nd.—Item, that the said barony may not be possessed by any person professing a religion contrary to the reformed religion, even though they be the heirs and descendants of the seigneur baron, unless they shall first have obtained the permission and the investiture from Their Excellencies at Berne.

This clause, which prevented any Catholic from becoming a landowner in the Canton of Vaud, was altogether in harmony with the spirit of the legislature of a small country which, Protestant and republican as it was, imitated the same acts of intolerance and of injustice that were so justly reproached against Catholic and monarchical France. It was thus that at the end of the seventeenth century, when a declaration of faith, or a *consensus*, was drawn up by order of Their Excellencies at Berne, all the subjects of Their Excellencies were bound to bind themselves by oath to this declaration, and that the *Chambers of Religion* were invested with the power of punishing the offender, as they thought each case deserved, either with banishment, confiscation of their property, the scourge, branding them, the galleys, or with death.[1] The excluding

[1] See Verdeil, *Histoire du Canton de Vaud.* Things have since become changed very much for the better in the Canton of Vaud. The religious legislation in that canton is now of a very tolerant

clause was preserved in the laws of the Canton of Vaud until the time of the French Revolution; and we all know that it was that which prevented Voltaire (a very poor Catholic, as he wrote himself to Madame d'Épinay) from buying a house at Lausanne. When M. Necker bought Coppet the prohibition had taken a rather different form, and the new purchaser bound himself only not to transfer his barony "to any prince, lord, or foreign person, without having first obtained the permission of Their Excellencies at Berne, with the exception of his own lawful heirs professing the *holy reformed religion.*"

Their Excellencies at Berne intervened also in these contracts in a manner more lucrative to themselves. After M. Necker had paid as purchase-money for the castle 500,000 livres in French money, or 333,333 florins, 6 sols, 4 deniers, in Berne money, the land—the succession duty, as we should say—exacted by the Government of Berne, amounted to 121,979 florins, or to rather more than a third of the price paid for the property. But, on the other hand, the Government of Berne guaranteed to M. Necker the enjoyment of all the *pré-éminences et dépendances* of the barony of

character, and this tolerance is extended especially to the Catholics. Their liberty is assured to them both by statutes and by usage. In another canton not very far distant we do not find the same toleration allowed.

Coppet; that is to say, of a certain number of feudal rights, which constituted an important item in the revenue of the property, and which, when they were suppressed without any indemnity being paid in their stead, M. Necker's income became thereby considerably reduced. There was nothing in these rights at all exorbitant; they were in every respect such that a liberal minister under Louis XVI. might exact without any scruple of conscience. There was the right of parish overseeing, of wine-presses, etc. They were not abolished until the end of the century; the greatest noblemen in France had for some years past been deprived of their feudal fines, while the Baron de Coppet was still in the possession of his own.

The castle bought by M. Necker was then, as it is now, a large building without any distinctive feature of its own. The whole is divided into three separate buildings which as they turn backwards enclose an inner court. The entrance into this court must be made by passing under a vault; and an old iron grating, which in old days must have been used as a drawbridge, separates it from the park. On each side of this grating there is a large tower; of which one is modern, but the other—that in which the archives are kept—shows its venerable old age by the thickness of its walls; and there is underground a large sturdy pillar bearing an iron ring to

which prisoners doubtless used to be chained. On the ground floor was M. Necker's library, which afterwards became a show-room; and from this room there is only visible the tops of a row of plane trees, the foliage of which intercepts the houses in the village. But from the balcony which runs along in front of all the windows on the first story, there is a view of landscape scenery that gradually impresses itself upon the memory; and visitors, when they have once been to Coppet, are often tempted to return to see again that which had before given them so much pleasure. This view has for them the same sort of attraction that, according to popular report, the water in the fountain of Trevi at Rome has upon all those who have once drank of it. Geneva lies on the right; at noon the town is less clearly seen, because the dazzling sun casts its rays upon the zinc-roofed town, but in the evening the houses become more visible, as they are seen in front of a reddened sky. Opposite are the mountains of Savoy, the great range of the Voirons, with their large slopes of a forest ground and pasture land; the Castle of Beauregard, of which the severe aspect seems to have prompted the idea of that strong figure of an *Homme d'autrefois*, so well described by his great-grandson,[1] and which, standing in front of

[1] The book bearing this title was written by the Marquis de Costa Beauregard. The "Homme d'autrefois" when at Versailles did not

Coppet, recalls a whole world of different thoughts. On the left there is the lake in all its grandeur spreading forth towards Lausanne the unbroken sheet of its blue waters. But any one who, without first going into the house, directed his steps towards the park, attracted by the freshness of the shade, might think as he roamed about, that he was a hundred miles from the lake and from the mountains. Two great straight avenues of trees, the last remains of a garden laid out according to French ideas, are there to tell him that the park was planned at a time when people did not look round about them, but when they thought rather of the pleasure of conversing as they walked about, or sat down in the shade which the trees afforded to them. We need not, therefore, be astonished that these large trees, which Mme. de Staël used to call "her friends who watched over her destiny," shut out the view from all sides, and at rare intervals disclosed only a very limited view of the Jura mountains. As Coppet was a hundred years ago, so it now remains; not a stone has been changed. More modern houses have since then been built upon the hills looking over the lake, and these may have an appearance of greater sumptuousness, and their gardens

escape from the enthusiasm that M. Necker created. And perhaps this recollection has caused his kind-hearted biographer to show some indulgence to him as well as to M. Necker.

are laid out more in accordance with our present tastes. But when we have satisfied ourselves with these delights and we make our way into this inner silent and sombre courtyard, and especially when we have crossed the threshold of the house, in which some of the rooms have been left unaltered, and show the impress of times past and gone, and also seem ready to welcome their former occupants—we cannot then refuse to the old castle, nor to the recollections which it brings back, the charms and the melancholy grandeur of things that no longer exist.

CHAPTER IX.

COPPET DURING THE REVOLUTION.

WHEN at the end of September in the year 1790, M. and Mme. Necker descended from the post carriage into the courtyard at Coppet, the somewhat melancholy sentiment that they would naturally have in coming back in the fall of the year to a house that had long been unoccupied, pressed itself upon them with more than ordinary force. M. Necker had been vilified by his adversaries, abandoned by his friends, and disowned by the country that he had adopted. And his wife also must have felt very strongly the contrast between this return to Coppet and the first time she went there some few years previously, when before all the friends of her troubled youth she showed herself fully grateful for all the good things that wealth had given to her, and that her heart also was rich with hopes for the future. Almost immediately after their arrival, each in their own apartment,—M. Necker occupied a room that looked

towards Geneva, and Mme. Necker a large dark room looking out on to the park,—they endeavoured to devote their time to that special occupation most suitable to their own different natures. Mme. Necker strove to bring her friends round her, and her husband passed his hours in hard work.

When M. Necker found himself with his pen in his hand immediately after his return to Coppet he was obliged to confess that "the respect which he had religiously paid to public opinion had become much weakened since he had perceived that public opinion had allowed itself to be ruled by the wiles of bad men, and that it had trembled before those same men whom it had formerly dragged before its own tribunal, to stigmatise them and to brand them with the marks of its reprobation." But still it was to public opinion that he appealed when in his *Essai sur l'Administration de M. Necker par lui-même*, he undertook to justify his own conduct on the difficult times through which he had just passed. We need not expect to find in this *Essai* a complete history of the long days of the Revolution, nor detailed account of M. Necker's measures. But, nevertheless, I would recommend a perusal of this work, that is now almost forgotten, to those who in a reactionary spirit are now hostilely opposed to the Constituent Assembly. They will have the satisfaction of there finding, expressed in

a tone of sufficient acerbity, the greater part of those attacks which they are now making against the work of the legislators of 1789, and also a very shrewd indication of its weak points. But however well founded may be M. Necker's remarks, the feeling of personal animosity, that was impossible for him to conceal, detracts somewhat from the value of his *Essai*, and prevents us from giving to it that consideration which is due to an historical or a political work.

But this is by no means the case with his *Étude sur le pouvoir exécutif dans les grands États*, which he began immediately after he had finished the other book, and which he published in the early part of the year 1792. M. Nourrisson has passed upon this a severe and harsh judgment; but even he is obliged to admit that of all M. Necker's disquisitions he has here shown the greatest political sagacity, and that this work ought to admit him into the rank of publicists. This book gives us something more than a sound demonstration of the perils to which the French constitution was exposing the country in the year 1791. We see in it a clear analysis of those evils inherent to pure democracy, and a very true prediction of the consequences into which its triumph will inevitably lead a great country. And in a matter so general, we may apply to the present times more than one remark made by M. Necker a

hundred years ago. Do we not now see how true is the picture he draws of an assembly that wishes to render itself both permanent and omnipotent?—

Were we to have a sitting that should last for two years without interruption there would not then be time for each deputy to put his word into this logogriph, so that he might send to his constituents in his district or in his municipality some words of his, however little, unimportant, or unremarkable, they were. Of these seven hundred and forty-five men there would be, perhaps, seven hundred and forty who were quite new to oratorical honours. All of these men must necessarily make their trial; they must all share in the general satisfaction,—some in their successes, others in their hopes, others to take their part in the general triumph. We may add that the eighteen francs a day, punctually paid, would also be a connecting link, though an almost imperceptible one. This is only a guess, but still the thing is possible. And what pleasure would it not be for all of these gentlemen to give their orders to their chief clerk, the King of France! What pleasure would they not have could they, with the aid of a whistle, bring all their ministers before them on their trial! Their minds would never become satiated with the idea they had of their own importance . . . and as all matters of business must at last be transacted by those who in truth are in command, even though it may be difficult to get at them, all complaints and addresses will be made to the national assembly, and this assembly, recognising the continual increase of its own power, will become more and more every day the first or central point in which authority of all kinds is invested. It will allow the government to decide only upon knotty or disagreeable matters, and we may be sure will not take the trouble to pass censure upon any of its measures.

Might we not also invite the attention, not of our seven hundred and forty-five, but of our five hundred

and fifty deputies, to ponder over these reflections upon the ephemeral character of popularity :—

But the great troubles will happen when every sort of power has been entrusted to those men elected by the nation ; for the representatives of the people, in full possession of all authority, will thus have to render account to the people, and will not be able to banish from them their fears by fixing, as they do now, all their thoughts on the enemies with which they (the people) are surrounded, or upon the battles which they must wage against them. When victory has once been won, when authority has once been accepted, these excuses will be no longer admissible. The people may still yet for a while be beguiled by adulation, when they are told that they rose up majestically, that they maintained a splendid attitude of defence, that the eyes of the whole world are upon them, and that the whole world is singing their praises. But promises and hopes will one day become exhausted ; for the nature of things is deaf and dumb, and the language of hypocrisy cannot stand against it. We shall see, sooner or later, that it is impossible to give to twenty-six millions of crowned heads, a position in life proportionate to their dignity ; and when they shall see, the most of them, that the rain comes in through their roofs, that the wind beats in through their doors, that the price of bread and the scale of wages are above their ruling,—when they see these things they will know that they have been deceived ; they will lend an ear again to fresh seductions, and their last friends, their last champions, will find in their turn that their authority shall be overthrown.

Louis XVI. was still upon the throne when M. Necker's work appeared, but the guardianship that had been exercised over him since the attempt made by Varennes was every day becoming more severe. M. Necker, therefore, wished to show to the sovereign whom he

had served with so much devotedness, that was often ill requited, a fresh mark of his sympathy, and he sent to Louis his last work, and at the same time sent also the following letter:—

I would wish that this work, which I consider to be absolutely necessary for my defence, should obtain the approbation of your Majesty. I have there made use of some expressions concerning your Majesty personally, and these sentiments I shall retain until the end of my life. There is no moment in the day in which I am not moved with feelings of pity for the most virtuous of princes and the most unfortunate of monarchs, and it is with the greatest sorrow that I reflect upon the state of his present unhappiness.

Louis XVI. did not reply to this letter. His own troubles and the dangers of his own situation pressed upon him so heavily that he probably had neither the time nor the inclination to read the work written by his late minister. But there are in the book pages which, if he had seen, would have touched him because of the tone in which M. Necker more than once speaks of his former master. In none of the books that he wrote, either before or after the death of Louis XVI., did M. Necker lose an opportunity of warmly testifying to the virtues, to the straightforwardness, and to the patriotic sentiments of the prince under whom he had served; and also never did M. Necker show any slightest sign of bitterness when he recollected the prejudices against which he always had to struggle; of the desertion to

which he had twice been a victim, nor of the absence of gratitude shown for his last efforts. All the emigrants into France did not speak of Louis XVI. in the same tone; and the difference between the two styles of language would show, if proof were needed, that those democrats who are the most *intransigeants*, to employ a word now in vogue, are not always the most respectful.

M. Necker was still enjoying the full use of all his faculties, and he could therefore demand from hard work those consolations which it never refuses; but Mme. Necker, several years younger than her husband, felt that she was losing all those resources to which she would have appealed to fortify her courage. Before these last events, the reaction of which she felt very deeply, had altogether destroyed her health, that was already much shattered, her weakness, which was growing upon her every day, had compelled her to give up living much in society; and there are certain reflections to be found here and there in what she has written, showing that she felt old age coming too soon upon her. "When we get old," she says somewhere, "we must endeavour to support ourselves, and still more must we endeavour not to be a burden to others." And again, in another place, "Old age in women is only tolerable in this world when they take up no room, when they do not make a noise, when they ask for no favours, when they

render happy all those who are dependent upon them, and when they do not show themselves except to make other people happy. When we get old and we have done our duty upon this earth, we must consider as pretty well employed that time which we pass in doing no harm, without being bored, and without suffering."

And the feeling of melancholy, not altogether foreign to Mme. Necker's nature, must have become aggravated by the fact that she who had devoted so much of her time to the society of her friends, was now deprived of that assistance which they might have given to her in helping her to pass the latter and somewhat painful years of her life. When M. Necker had bought Coppet, Thomas, who always had a strong dislike to Paris, and who was fond of a solitary life, thought of buying a little house in the village and coming to live near to her. "I shall be near to you," he wrote to her; "I can see you every day and every hour that you are at liberty. I shall be your vassal and M. Necker's, and no fealty was ever so sweet." But Thomas had disappeared; and this charming idea of vassalage, as Mme. Necker used to say, was interrupted by the hand of death. Nor did she again find in Switzerland that man from whom and to whom in her younger days, she received and bore all those marks of warm friendship in which, when a woman is

quite sure of herself, she may be allowed to indulge. It was more than two years since Moultou died; but to whichever direction Mme. Necker turned her thoughts she found only recollections of the past. And she proudly cherished the reminiscences of days gone by. She wrote affectionate letters to Moultou's widow, to his daughters, to his sister-in-law Gothon,—her who had been once such a dear friend—begging and praying them to come to Coppet, and there to stay with her for a long time. Or again, recalling the memories of days still more remote, Mme. Necker would think of all that happened in her girlhood, the scene of which was so close to Coppet, and then the chords in her heart would begin to beat more strongly than ever.

We may recollect the very strong love that Suzanne Curchod bore to her mother, of the hopeless state of despair into which she was thrown when she heard of her sudden death, and how bitterly she reproached herself, because she perceived that through her caprices she had troubled the last days of a mother whom she loved so well. The sting of this remorse, of which she most unduly exaggerated the importance in her own mind, had never ceased (as her own papers will bear witness) to torment an over-scrupulous conscience; and it was doubtless when she was oppressed by these feelings of regret that she once wrote: "There are recollections so tender and so

sorrowful that they decide the destiny of a whole life." But now, when after so many changes, it happened that she was back again in the same country and so close to where she had spent her earliest days, when she was but an hour's journey from the parsonage house at Crassier, in which she had been born and brought up, her old recollections came back upon her with almost terrible force, and she wished to give a new life to that which was past and gone, and to perpetuate the memories of old times in the form in which she herself had known them. Very soon after she had got back to Coppet she decided upon erecting in the village church a monument to the memory of her parents,—which monument still exists,—and she caused to be engraved on it an inscription testifying her love for them and how great was her sorrow at their death. Inscriptions of this kind are no longer customary with us, and we become almost tempted to smile at the vain efforts of man to struggle against the incessant march of time and of the ever lengthening past. Most of us are now driven to acknowledge that this struggle is hopeless, and that we ought rather to endeavour to concentrate in ourselves an interest for our lives and for that which is passing immediately around us, than clog our memories with vain regrets.

But there was, nevertheless, one person very near to

Coppet, with whom Mme. Necker could talk of the past,—and of the past from which time had taken off all angry or bitter feelings, and brought with it only the charm of memory. I mean Gibbon. Lausanne had for a long time past been to Gibbon a second mother country. It was there that, after an incursion, happily a short one, into the field of politics, he had come to seek the leisure and the repose necessary for his long and compendious work. He there immortalised his name by writing that melancholy and eloquent history of the decadence of a people who could not find in the respect they felt for the recollection of their past glories a remedy against their internal differences. He also came to seek a studious repose under that same arbour of acacias beneath which, when his great work was finished, he used to walk up and down with melancholy thoughts, as one who had just torn himself away from a friend. When Mme. Necker had met him some years previously in Switzerland, she at once made to him a new and friendly appeal. Gibbon responded to this appeal with a warmth that might have deceived Mme. Necker, and in the month of October, 1790, he arrived at Coppet, there to spend a few days. But she would have been much pained had she known in what terms Gibbon wrote to his friend, Lord Sheffield, giving him an account of his visit:—

I spent four days at Coppet Castle with Necker. I should like to show him as an example to every young man, tortured by the demon of ambition. He has at his disposition everything that can make him happy, and he is the most unhappy creature alive. The past, the present, and the future, are all equally odious to him! When I suggested to him a few domestic distractions, that he should read, or that he should build, he answered me in a tone of utter hopelessness: "In my present condition I can only feel the blow that has knocked me down." Mme. Necker's outward manner is better; *mais le diable n'y perd rien.*

As ungrateful as a friend as he had been faithless as a lover, Gibbon could find nothing more to say about those who had shown him signs of their friendship when they had been happy, and when all the world had smiled upon them. However, he often renewed his visits, and as he came to know M. Necker more thoroughly, he formed of him a more favourable opinion:—

I have formed a much more favourable opinion of M. Necker than I had formerly. As one gets to know him he throws aside his reserve and his melancholy. I can also now judge better of his mind, and everything that I have seen is honest and straightforward. He was overtaken by the hurricane, and he lost his way in the fog: but I doubt by much if, in such a difficult situation, any other man would have done better.

But in his letters Gibbon never speaks of Mme. Necker herself, and the tenacity of those illusions which women are disposed to maintain about those men who have loved them (even though the men have

proved faithless) could alone dissimulate from her that he was not the sort of friend of which she then stood in need. Except the few visits that Gibbon paid to Coppet, the kind of life led by M. and Mme. Necker was very solitary. But still the number of travellers that passed close by to them was always increasing. Some went from Geneva to reside at Turin, and to be present at the small court of the Comte d'Artois; others settled themselves at Lausanne, or on the hills in the Canton of Vaud, there to wait for the end of that which they called *la giboulée* (the hailstorm). M. and Mme. Necker were therefore all alone, cherishing their hopes, their fancies, and their less pleasing thoughts. They lived that life of heroism and of frivolity which excites both our impatience and our admiration. A sort of interdiction had been placed upon Coppet, and any man who went to visit the late minister of Louis XVI. would have been considered as a traitor both to his king and his country. "There is not a Frenchman," Gibbon wrote to Lord Sheffield, "who would now wish to put his foot inside M. Necker's house." This solitude was therefore complete until that time when Mme. de Staël, driven out from France by what was then taking place, came to take up her abode at her father's and mother's house.

Mme. de Staël had paid them a visit shortly after

their arrival in 1790. She was not very fond of Coppet, but she thought that her parents would not stay there very long. She hoped to be able to induce her father to return to Paris,—a hope which was never gratified. She thus wrote to her husband :—

We have now in this castle the kind-hearted Formier[1] and Mr. Gibbon, the author of the *History of the Low Empire*. He was once in love with my mother, and wished to marry her. When I look at him, I ask myself if I could have been his daughter, and I answer, No; that my own father alone could have brought me into the world. I wish very, very much that my father would come back to Paris. The air of this country does not agree with him. His teeth give him a great deal of pain, and for the last four days he has been suffering from an abscess, and has not been able to leave his own room. He is melancholy, but kind and affectionate, as I have always found him. I come upon him sometimes when he is bathed in tears, when he is contemplating the wonderful instances of human fickleness; the love and ingratitude shown by a great nation. But I try to drive from him every thought that may give him pain. This morning he called me Roger Bontemps, and I let him say so as often as he pleased. But I am far from being happy with joyful happiness, and perhaps I never felt come over me so much feeling of profound melancholy. I do not like this country at all; and though I get on very well with the Genevese, I feel the want of telling myself that I ought to endeavour to please. You will understand that is my natural disposition. I

[1] He whom Mme. de Staël calls the kind-hearted Formier was a Protestant, born at Nimes in 1728, and died in Paris in 1815. He was an intimate friend of M. Necker's; and appears, no doubt from his sympathy with her in theological doctrines, to have exercised upon her a certain moral and religious influence.

should very much like to come back again to Paris, and I wish especially that my father would come back with me. Good-bye, my dear friend.

Events were then moving very quickly in France, and it seemed as though they were rushing on towards some fatal solution. The more difficult they became, the more restrained Mme. de Staël felt herself to be at Coppet. This artificial tranquillity contrasted too strongly with what was passing outside, and with the agitations of her own thoughts. "People live here," she wrote, "in silence, in an infernal peace; I shudder, I am dying in this nothingness." She could not much longer bear the solitude, and she returned to her husband, who was still the representative of the government of Stockholm. M. de Staël began to perceive that this position was becoming much less firm. Gustavus III., who had put himself at the head of a counter-revolutionary movement in Europe, could not forgive in his ambassador the enthusiasm which he could not refrain from showing for the first measures of the Constituent Assembly; and perhaps, also, he was displeased at the firm tone in which, in his despatches, his ambassador continued to declare as chimerical all the projects of a counter-revolution in France. This coldness soon turned into an open quarrel; and M. de Staël wrote to his father-in-law, informing him that in spite of the engagement entered into by Gustavus III.

in his marriage contract with Mademoiselle Necker, he was now deprived of his situation as Swedish ambassador in Paris:—[1]

PARIS, 16*th January*, 1792.

I had, sir, for a while, some hopes that those dangers would disappear which made me afraid that I should lose my place; but I was, as you know, deceived in my expectations. All my efforts proved useless, and I had to give way, for the combination of events rendered my fall necessary. The King has said nothing to me about any indemnity that he may think right to allow me, still less of those marks of satisfaction which perhaps I have deserved; not a word as to my pension, wherewith to pay the rent of my house; nor has he attempted to justify his conduct to me. My friends tell me that all will come right if I have patience, and especially if I do not show any sign of discontent. I have followed their counsels; but, at the same time, I think that my presence in Sweden is of the utmost importance, for as things ordinarily go in this world, one's friends are less active than are those who endeavour to do one an injury.

M. de Staël continued, insisting upon the reasons that made it necessary that he should leave Paris for Sweden, and he thus ends his letter:—

You were kind enough to tell me, sir, in your last letter, that I might find a home with you. I was touched to the bottom of my heart with all the kindness contained in your offer to me. I may assure you, and with truth, that I should prefer to all attractions that the world can give me the happiness of spending my life near a great man whom I love, and whose genius and

[1] After the death of Gustavus III., in March, 1792, M. de Staël was reinstated in his old position by the Duc de Sudermanie, afterwards Charles XIII., who was then Regent.

virtue I admire so thoroughly. I should have only the regret of feeling at every moment that I could do nothing for his happiness whereas he was doing everything for mine.

This home that M. Necker was offering to his son-in-law he would have wished also his daughter to share. But Mme. de Staël could not make up her mind to leave Paris; it would have cost too much to her passionate love for France to appear in this all-important moment as though she had lost interest in her fate; it would have been too painful to her sense of pride to follow the example of those fugitives who escaped at the sound of the first bell, and against whom she had risen her voice so loudly. She felt that she would have been lacking in courage if she had abandoned friends to whom she might be useful in offering to them a shelter under the roof of the Swedish Embassy, and in promising to them passports which she solicited for them as she did for her husband's own countrymen.

It was to her obstinate resolution to remain in Paris that we owe those fine pages, the *Considérations sur la Révolution Française*, in which she describes so eloquently the progress of the Revolution, and in which, undeceived as to the illusions of her youth, though without having abjured her generous opinions, she gives to every one his full share of praise and of censure. The spectacle which was now passing before her eyes had altered

many of her opinions, and that irritation which she formerly felt against the *aristocrates*, when they refused to listen to M. Necker's arguments, was followed by a virulent indignation against those fanatical Jacobins who caused to be felt all over France the network of their tyranny. The anger that she had felt against the royal family at the time of her father's first exile and then of his abandonment, was afterwards changed into a feeling of deep compassion for the affronts which so poor and faint-hearted an assembly caused the King to endure, and for those petty humiliations in captivity which, since the flight of Varennes, was imposed upon all the royal family. This compassion did not show itself in sterile lamentation. Mme. de Staël called Malouet to her one day and submitted to him a plan of escape for the King and for the Queen. She wished to buy a plot of land that was to be sold near to Dieppe. She went there twice, taking with her each time, besides her son, who was about the same age as the Dauphin, a man whose stature was very like that of the King, and two women, of whom one very closely resembled Marie Antoinette, and the other Mme. Elisabeth. For the third journey she would have left her son in Paris and taken with her all the royal family. But the Queen refused to enter into the project. Excess of misfortune had thrown a veil over her eyes, and

through this veil she could not distinguish between her real enemies, those who had determined upon her downfall, and those who at the outbreak of the Revolution might have blamed the Court policy, but who looked with horror upon the crimes they feared were about to take place. A few days afterwards happened those events which took place on the 1st of June, then those on the 10th of August. Mme. de Staël remained in Paris until the 1st of September, less concerned with her own safety than that of her friends, of whom several, and, among others, MM. de Lally and de Jaucourt, owed to her their lives. She left Paris at last, the day when the great massacres began, and arrived at Coppet in the early part of September, 1792.

If the few weeks that Mme. de Staël spent at Coppet during her first stay were oppressive to her, what must she have now felt in her new life, of which the peaceful uniformity contrasted so strongly with the emotions and the danger from which she had just escaped. There is not, for active and generous natures, a trial more difficult to undergo than that of artificial inaction and security, when the persons themselves are in fact surrounded by public danger. This little corner in the Canton of Vaud was allowed to enjoy still for a few years—between France on the one side of her given up to anarchy, and on the other Savoy and the territory

of Geneva, soon about to be invaded by the revolutionary armies—a peaceful tranquillity for which the inhabitants were indeed much to be envied. But it was this same tranquillity that weighed so heavily upon Mme. de Staël, and which drew from her tears of eloquent distractedness. Often, in the middle of this silent oasis, she would regret Paris, where the scaffold had been permanently put up, and where she was much tempted to return, incited by the most noble-hearted motives, —to render a service to friends whom she had left behind.

I regard all Switzerland (she wrote to her husband) with a magnificent horror. Sometimes I think that if one had in Paris a title that people were obliged to respect, one might render a service to a great number of individuals, and this life makes me brave everything. I see without very much difficulty that that which suits me less than anything else in the world is leading a quiet life in the country; for this overpowers one. I have got rid of my horses for the sake of economy, and because I feel my solitude rather less when I see nobody. . . . What a horrible scourge is democracy after the French fashion!

Events in France were following each other with fearful shedding of blood, and the awful spectacles which Mme. de Staël saw from afar caused her to waver in those sentiments which, further and deeper than any other, had taken root in her heart: her love for France, and her faith in the triumph of that which is good by means of liberty. In one of these moments of her

trouble she wrote to her husband, who was still at Stockholm:—

Here is a great piece of news: the taking of Toulon.[1] You may feel some pleasure in having prophesied it; but are you not confounded with this ever constant succession of crimes, and does not all this spectacle plunge you into a fearful unbelief as to all sentiments, all ideas, and all calculations? Shall I tell you the result that all these events have brought about in my mind? That we had better have all our money in America, and escape from our present situation. Liberty, fortune, and friendship, these are what we must try and save. A fine climate, music, and an agreeable concourse of friends, are the only pleasures with which in France we have not become disenchanted. In other countries there is no longer rank, honour, nor dignity; this whirlpool has swallowed down everything. However, this taking of Toulon may be the downfall of Mr. Pitt; I should then like England better. I am also very anxious to hear what you tell me of Copenhagen. We might establish ourselves there for a short time, but I should above all things dislike that you should accept any situation that would bind you to live in Sweden. You are preparing yourself for a lot in life somewhat similar to that of my father. To set up one's back against the increase of knowledge is self-destruction; and even to give countenance to it is placing oneself at the head of a long chapter of blood and misery. If you will allow me to have an opinion, it is on this chance of fortune that he has made up his mind most strongly.

If there were certain days when Mme. de Staël's courage failed her and she seemed to be almost drowned in despair, she never lost the strong interest that she bore to her friends in France, nor the energy with which she endeavoured to afford to them assistance.

[1] Toulon was retaken from the English, the 19th December, 1793.

Immediately after her arrival at Coppet she had contrived a scheme whereby she could be useful to them. Let us see how she herself in a letter exposes this plan, and her method, to which more than one Frenchman owed to her his life:—

The whole secret of this undertaking is very simple. You must find a woman who in appearance is the same as her you want to rescue. This woman says that she has business to do, and she gets a passport enabling her to enter Paris and to leave it. The Swiss woman therefore goes as to Paris, she gets her passport *viséd* at the frontier, she goes to the section and to the commune of Paris indicated in order to obtain the *visé* allowing her to quit the capital, then she hands over her passport, the register of her baptism, her letters of citizenship, and all her papers attesting her Swiss nationality, to her whom she wishes to save. Then in coming back by another route she cannot be hindered. No instance has yet happened of such a misfortune; but even were it to occur I have the promise of a most excellent man who commands the whole of the Swiss frontier, to declare any woman to be Swiss. And so great is the coquetry of the French for the Swiss, that they have released and sent away merely at the request of a common woman a man as to whom it was impossible to say whether he was in fact French or not.

This method might be found out if one made too frequent use of it in any one year; but, whether *they* ignore it, or whether *they* are very glad that people should take themselves out of the way, no word has ever been said to give rise to any uneasiness. I invented it the first time for Matthieu et François.[1] This secret is very simple. The Lyonnese have since made use of it, and it has never failed. It is impossible to prove to you

[1] Madame de Staël here refers to the Viscount Matthieu, afterwards Duc de Montmorency, and to the Comte François de Jaucourt, who was for a short time a minister under the Restoration.

that you are not Swiss, especially when you have with you a companion who is really Swiss and who protects you. The Swiss woman who is sent conceals in her pocket or gets sent to her by some sure means a passport not *visé*d, on which she forges as well as she can the *visés* of the frontier; she returns to the commune after the departure of the lady and is not recognised, as she has changed her costume and has passed under another Swiss name. In point of fact she has nothing to fear; she may run a risk of losing some money, but this may happen to anybody else. A man costs less to save, because you need send only one man, and for a woman you must have a man and a woman also.

The letter of which the above is a fragment was written to the Princesse d'Hénin, whom we shall see taking an active part in the generous undertaking devised by Mme. de Staël. The Princesse d'Hénin belongs to that small group of women who in less troubled times professed a warm enthusiasm for M. Necker and for his movements of reform. She was by birth a Mauconseil; her father had been a page of Louis XVI., and her mother had been remarked by Louis XV. because of her great beauty. She had married the Prince d'Hénin, who, because of his small stature, was called, "the dwarf prince"; and he had shown to the celebrated actress Sophie Arnould[1] an uncommon and a misplaced friendship.

[1] Madeleine Sophie Arnould, born in 1744, died in 1803. Her reputation is due as much to her ready wit as to her talent as an actress. She left the stage in 1788, and Prince d'Hénin's intimacy with her gave rise to a good deal of talk. Charles Alexandre Marc Marcellin, Prince d'Hénin, was guillotined in 1794; the Princess lived until about the year 1830.

Our aunt d'Hénin (says the Vicomtesse de Noailles in a notice she wrote upon her grandmother,[1] the Princesse de Poix) was handsome, a woman of fashion, and I am inclined to think something of a coquette. An only daughter, very pretty, rich, and perhaps also a spoilt child, she was during all her life a woman who liked to have her own way, impetuous, hot-tempered, but still so good hearted, so generous, so true to her friends and having so much fine feeling, so witty, and also, because she was completely free from affectation, so original, that she won the affection and admiration and the good will of everybody. Her reputation was attacked on two occasions; the first time with regard to the Chevalier de Coigny, and the second time, the Marquis de Lally Tollendal. The first bit of tittle-tattle was hardly founded; the second became respectable, for there was between them a very warm friendship which lasted until my aunt's death. Some years before her death she became an ardent devotee.

Although M. de Lally Tollendal doubtless inspired his friend with some of his own ardour and his own enthusiasm, and although she may have welcomed, as did Mme. de Staël, the early episodes in the French Revolution, still the Princesse d'Hénin soon became frightened at the violence with which everything was being hurled along, and she was one of the first of

[1] This notice has been published, but only a small number of copies were printed. It contains many acute observations and interesting details on the old state of French society, and upon the regeneration of this society on the return of the exiles. Sainte-Beuve has often quoted extracts from it in his *Causeries de Lundi*, and especially in his article upon the Duc de Lauzun. The Vicomtesse de Noailles is well known to the readers of the correspondence of Jean Jacques Ampère.

those women who went to England, there to seek refuge. It was from England that she joined her efforts to those made by Mme. de Staël to send to those of their friends who had not yet been able to escape from France, hope, assistance, and other means of delivery. There were not wanting people to whom this solicitude would have been most grateful, but among the prisoners the Princesse d'Hénin and Mme. de Staël had one common friend who was very dear to them both, the Princesse de Poix. The Princesse de Poix was the daughter by the first marriage of the Maréchal de Beauvau with a Bouillon, and therefore she was a daughter-in-law of that Maréchal de Beauvau who was such a true friend to the Neckers. Owing to one of those family arrangements that were so common under the old state of society in France, she had at the age of seventeen, when she was pretty, full of life and of wit, married the Prince de Poix, who was then only fifteen, and who was so small for his age that upon his marriage day he had to be placed upon a high chair in order that he might not appear less small than his wife.

I have heard it said (the Vicomtesse de Noailles continues in that notice of which I have just spoken) that it was impossible to be more charming than my grandmother. Her nose was aquiline but delicately formed; her eyes were black but very deep set; her mouth was perfect, for kindness, intelligence,

pride, and, above all, an exquisite sense of taste showed itself there with as much force as there was charm in observing it. Her neck and her throat were superb; and in spite of the imperfections of her stature (the Princesse de Poix was lame from her birth), her whole person, although irregular, was noble and even graceful. There was originality in her gestures as well as in her expressions; awkward in everything, this clumsiness sat well upon her; but that which was predominant in her, and gave a light, so to say, to all her charms, was, if I may so speak, a high, generous, and great heart—a heart that always made itself felt even through her joyfulness of manner, and which fascinated every one, and filled them with feelings of admiration and confidence.

It was this amiable woman that Mme. de Staël endeavoured to save, in spite of the strict watchfulness that was exercised at all the gates of Paris, and at the frontiers, from the maltreatment of the *aristocrates;* —and, what was still more difficult, in spite of herself. As a matter of fact, whether it was her courage, or her apathy, or that she exaggerated to herself the difficulties of her infirmity, which was increased by her constant ill-health—in itself a very serious drawback to any attempt at evasion—however this may be, the Princesse de Poix turned a deaf ear to all solicitations sent to her by her friends both in England and in Switzerland. She was resolved to remain in Paris, where she was a prisoner, though unguarded, in the Hôtel de Beauvau, and her life there must have been very lonely. Her husband had emigrated, as did also her eldest son, the Comte Charles

de Noailles. Her father, the Maréchal de Beauvau, had died in 1793; her step-mother, the Maréchale, had fled to her property at Val, near Saint Germain. The father and the mother of her husband, the Duc and the Duchesse de Mouchy, had been thrown into prison during the Terror, and they did not come out until they had to mount the scaffold. The Princesse de Poix lived therefore quite alone with a boy of fourteen, shut up in that large Hôtel de Beauvau, which once had been the scene of so many brilliant reunions.[1] It was from that dangerous situation that the Princesse d'Hénin and Mme. de Staël wished to deliver her, and we shall see from some of Mme. de Staël's letters to the Princess how eagerly she strove to perform her self-allotted task :—

LAUSANNE, *8th June* (1794).

In spite of your advice, I could not help telling our infirm friend how easy it would be for her and for her son to escape. She will not hear of it. Until the traveller returns I shall know nothing more. I think she must be in a private hospital. If she had only believed me four months ago! I am not imprudent in such matters. All my thoughts are turned towards her, in France and in Switzerland I think principally of her; and that which I proposed to her was *safe*, except, however, those apprehensions of arrest which four months back did not exist. Her chambermaid waits upon her; you will hear all the details in a fortnight or three weeks hence.

[1] The Hôtel de Beauvau is now the residence of the Minister of the Interior.

As regards the young lady, I knew that she was in the English convent; and yet I am told there is hope. I do not understand how there can be any hope left, and I feel but little. At any rate, on the 21st of May she was safe—as far as we can gather from letters that tell one everything but the truth. Do not make yourself uneasy as to this unlucky attempt; there was no fear of any accident, and so great was my fright after the misfortune of the unhappy Duchesses,[1] that I would have given all I possess on the earth to have convinced her of the efficacy of those means that as yet have failed in no instance, though unfortunately now they are resorted to frequently enough, and they consequently become dearer. As to the *interests* of Malouet, tell him that the man has not come back. He ought to answer some simple questions that I have asked him, and now I am waiting for his reply to a long letter that I wrote to him. Here is also a line for Charles de Noailles. I have lost his address; but you can tell him that which he wishes to know.

The infirm friend spoken of in her letter is of course the Princesse de Poix. By the *interests* of Malouet we are to understand his wife and his daughter, who had remained at Verberie at the house of Chabanon de Maugris, the mother of Chabanon the Academician. The young lady at the English convent (the convent for the English Augustine Sisters, transformed into a prison) was Mme. de Simiane, an intimate friend of the Princesse de Poix and of Mme. de Staël. Mme. de Simiane is again another of those women who

[1] The Dowager Duchesse de Noailles, the Duchesse d'Ayen her daughter-in-law, the Vicomtesse de Noailles her granddaughter, had just been thrown into prison, and were obliged the same day to mount the scaffold.

lived under the old state of society whom we should have liked to have known, because from their contemporaries we have heard so much of their charms of manner and of their power of pleasing in conversation.[1] Of her the Vicomtesse de Noailles says :—

Mme. de Simiane was the prettiest woman in her day. Whenever I have heard of her great success from those who knew her, I have always had for her a feeling of reverence. Somebody said *that it was impossible to receive her without making an ovation to her.* When I saw her she was no longer young, and I was then a child ; but still I understand the sort of effect she would produce. It is simple enough. She was the prettiest of women, and she was also the best ; and up to her last day her real goodness of heart, together with her ever constant wish to please, spread around about her a sort of magic hallucination.

Mme. de Simiane was one of that small society which before the Revolution used to meet at the Swedish Embassy, and we shall now see, from Mme. de Staël's letters to the Princesse d'Hénin, how the anxiety for her welfare was shared by those two ladies and also by the Princesse de Poix :—

LAUSANNE, *June 17th.*

I now send you an entire letter, full of many details which do not concern you ; but I should like you to see the words themselves. He who wrote it, and who has found means of sending it to me through safe hands, is a young man from this part of the world, who will not accept one halfpenny in money,

[1] Mme. de Simiane's name before her marriage had been de Damas d'Hautefort. Like the Princesse d'Hénin, she lived until about the year 1830.

but who has become smitten with a sort of Platonic admiration for me. Mme. de Simiane gave him to Mme. de Poix, and from that time—that is to say, about six weeks back—he sees her occasionally, and he is the only man she employs to learn what is taking place. Suspicion has not yet fallen upon him, but his courage makes me very uneasy. He was the friend of Mme. de Simiane before I saw him; I got him from her, but I do not write to him except to caution him. You see that at the beginning of his letter he says that I am *pusillanimous.*

I will go on with my notes on this letter. *Stomberg* is François de Jaucourt, with whom he is personally acquainted; the *conductors* whom he mentions are in truth safe men, by whom one may send a message, but as they are French I have never employed them. The bookseller is a man sent by Mme. de Noailles. I did not give him the address of my Swiss friend, because I did not wish that he should converse with Madame de Poix; but she wanted to see him. I need not tell you who is *the noble and generous friend.* What troubles me most is that verbally she lets me know that her chambermaids were Jacobins; and this puts another obstacle in the way of the only rational project, which is her escape. Oh! you may believe me, it is in despair that I am to give up this idea—it is in despair. It is still possible to take post-horses to some distance outside Paris, and from there horses sent from Switzerland would perform the rest of the journey. Nothing is so easy as to get out, and to remain. . . . Ah! great heavens.

Juste (the second son of the Princesse de Poix) is, as you may see, in the country with Mme. de Beauvau. When he is old enough to be called upon, they wish that he should serve and desert; that is the only way to emigrate that does not compromise his parents. *The old de Lutry* is the man sent to get information about Malouet's family. The *deuced,* that is a sure way of writing: and you see that I am waiting for an explanation of the riddle: *you will not see me again except she be with me.*

I am mortally afraid for the young friend (Mme. de Simiane).

One of her brothers ought to come here with some money, and send a man who should endeavour to do for her that which is now being attempted for Mme. de Noailles. Mme. de Poix sent me a verbal demand for a passport for her (Mme. de Simiane), with her signature; but God knows if it will pass. I do not know why her relations are not all in Switzerland; it is there only that there is a chance of being useful.

Ask Charles de Noailles to show you his letter, and from this one you may show him that which concerns his mother. At La Bourbe Mme. de Simiane was in a simple house of detention; from there she went into a prison. This makes me very nervous. Mme. de Poix sent me word also that Mme. de Simiane as she went feared that she would compromise the abbé Damas (her brother). Ah! mon Dieu! How much goodness there is and how much hopelessness. I did not think I loved Mme. de Poix so well; now I think only of her. Those *persons* that I sent are a man for the little Narbonne, one for Malouet, and one for Mme. de Noailles. I was unwilling that they should hold any converse with my poor Swiss, who wrote me this letter. This is a man who has a heart, as you see, and he also has intelligence. I said to him only one thing: *Remain to save Mme. de Poix, and count upon everything that is at my disposal if you can succeed, no matter when.* You see all the precautions he took for the little Narbonne; and from this narrative you may judge of the details of the precautions.

At present *Verberie and the pretty sister-in-law of your friend* is Mme. de Behotte, *l'intérêt* de Malouet; and the friend of Berne is Mallet du Pan, who had spoken to him of their family. My messenger will report, as you know, the result of the journey to Montereau; as soon as I know it Malouet may be certain that I will act upon it.

Mme. de Cayla, the sister of François, has been arrested at Melun, but this need not frighten Malouet. François, though very good and very clever, does not know how to contrive anything, and he does not like other people to interfere in his own affairs. He has therefore *bungled* the whole of this affair,

and by his cleverness has sent the author of this letter to his friend, and without my knowing anything about it.

Tell Malouet, also, that if Mme. de Behotte wishes to come, the Swiss woman will go only as far as Montereau, and will show her passport; and in that way will be avoided all the difficulties of changing from one diligence into another, of which my poor friend speaks, and he is also the friend of François. I should have never entrusted to him any enterprise, except that of Mme. de Poix, if I depended only on him, or if I could stop his ardour.

Tell Charles de Noailles to show you the letter that I am writing to him. One might employ for Mme. de Simiane the same means that are being used for Mme. de Noailles; but for that we want friends and a good deal of money.

I suppose I am not tiring you by the length of these details. They will certainly be of use to you. I think I shall hear with exactness the news of Mme. de Poix from this good Swiss, who has arrived, and who has sent word to a woman here who sells millinery, that her cousin is in good health; that is enough for me. I will send her at once a collar, on which I will write with invisible ink, at the same time that I send the passports, begging her to be very careful, and to pray her for my sake to undertake only one affair, the interests and the orders of Mme. de Poix. There will be a passport for her in Paris. You understand it will not be at her house, and that it will be written under a Swiss name. That will help to make her decide at once if there be fresh danger. After that she must wrap up her head in a cloak and suffer without a murmur.

From inattention I have skipped a page. You know that you must not speak except to close friends of this scheme by the Swiss woman. I wish, though it may be nasty to say so, that only our friends knew of it. Those in Paris know at least that they can leave France as soon as they are free and the moment they please. The Vicomtesse de Laval, who has been arrested in the country, as was Mme. de Poix in Paris, will come with the man whom I gave to her son. Since I have seen you I have made

a close acquaintance with the country people. My society is now chiefly among those men who make a trade of people's lives. You can easily imagine how exciting is this conversation. I have seen a Genevese who is very artful; and he is quite ready to save Malouet. You will, of course, my dear Princess, give my news to Mme. de Poix.

LAUSANNE, *2nd July.*

I send you again, my dear Princess, fragments of letters which interest me, as they do you, to the bottom of the heart. I look upon the arrival of my young Swiss friend as a happy event. We must save our friend. She sent me word by the woman who was sent for Nathalie (the Comtesse Charles de Noailles), that she asked of me a passport for Juste, and that if only one of her friends escaped she would come. It is clear from this that she is shaken in her resolution. Ah! for pity's sake let her come, and let France fall into pieces. I was unfortunate in making this treaty. I do not ask for more than she does; but what a length of time, how many precautions, are necessary before it can be successful. If she really wishes it I will answer for the success; but she will flatter herself, and she will sacrifice herself.

I have made use of Charles's credit for the passport for Mme. de la Borde and for Juste; and if it be necessary I will take money for our friend,—all mine is ready and at her service. As I am writing to Charles *viâ* Flanders, I do not fully explain to him that I am ever constant in my endeavour to save his wife. I shall learn from my young friend what can be done in Paris in this respect, and I will give him a letter of credit. There is a Swiss merchant who has the means of doing this, and has given himself up to this undertaking; since one can travel by post there is greater chance of hope. His passport, issued by the commune in Paris, is placed in safe keeping; and I have sent another for Mme. de Borde, so that the two ladies should not be arrested the one for the other. The total sum of these expenses has mounted up to 160 louis, including

the first journey that was taken four months ago for Nathalie. This commerce in humanity has got to be much dearer lately. The man sent by Malouet has also come back. This is the answer. I do not think it necessary to show the words to Malouet, to whom I write in *vague terms* as to Mme. de Behotte. Everything was ready for her; we must begin again for his wife and for his son. If nothing happens during the next ten days, the passports will have come back from Baden, where is now Barthelemi.

Half of the expenses of the man's journey comes to twenty livres. I charged myself with the rest because he brought this letter from my young Swiss, and five livres for the passports. You will make Charles and Malouet come to you, will you not? When my young Swiss shall have arrived and departed again, I shall know all that it is possible to hope for Mme. de la Borde and her daughter,—but our friend! I send passports for Mme. de Beauvau, Mme. de Simiane, and the abbé Damas. When *she* learns from them the means of escape, will she then refuse to listen to my entreaties? So great happiness is not in store for us; but at least there is only one man in the secret, and prudence, which demands that time should be taken, says that there is no fear of compromise. Adieu, my dear Princess. You may be sure of my punctuality in writing to you.

LAUSANNE, 29*th July*.

What trouble you must have again suffered, my dear Princess, since your last letter! The Prince d'Hénin, Mme. de Biron . . . . and the terror which is increasing every hour. Since the 11th of July I have no news from her whom we love. I have sent word to Charles that his lady friend was transferred to the Conciergerie, and that I immediately sent a letter of credit of 40,000 livres, to risk everything to win over the jailer, and to promise him a sure escort out of France. Since this message was sent, and as to which I have not as yet received any news, a Swiss merchant—not he whose letters I have sent you, but a paid man whom I have devoted entirely to Charles's friend—sends

me word that he has hopes of being able to save her in three weeks' time. I have so little confidence in this letter that I do not send it directly to Charles. Nor have I any news from the messenger for the young lady, but I have advised not to write without necessity; and in that letter of the 11th of July, which announced the removal of Charles's friend, and the despair that was felt by our friend, I was asked with the same eagerness that I had shown, and it seemed to me that the same hopes were entertained. I am now expecting every day to hear of life or of death, for I have sent for our friend everything that was asked of me. A lame woman has gone away, a young man for the son, and means for the grandmother. I remembered the word: *Save the lady, who is my friend, and I follow you everywhere.* With the eagerness of one who feels sure of the proscription of all the individuals arrested in France, I begged that my last prayer should be granted, and that the utmost means that I had at my disposal should be used. I am now waiting for the result. Nothing further can be attempted. We must wrap our cloaks around us, and expect either heaven or hell, either Providence or the hangman.

The agent of the young lady friend in Swiss is useless in my opinion—no activity, no feeling. Mme. de Tott, in whom confidence is placed, is still more incapable, as far as I can see, of a true attachment, and one free from calculation. But these drawbacks have nothing to do with the present circumstances. I think the fate of the young friend is now decided. If she has been extricated from prison, she will be here, doubtless, within a week; and our own lady friend will have followed her, for it is impossible that she should not perceive the impossibility of remaining after she has become mixed up in the escape of the young lady. I dream; in truth I am dreaming; so much good fortune does not appear to be in the natural order of things.

The Princesse de Broglie has escaped from a house of detention at Vesoul, and has arrived here by following our plan. It was Théodore who assisted her.

I may be pardoned for having quoted these three letters, in spite of their length and their disorder; for if, from a literary point of view, we may find letters that are better written, we shall assuredly find none that do more honour to Mme. de Staël. It will be seen that her activity and her solicitude were not confined only to her two friends, the Princesse de Poix and to Mme. de Simiane, but that going from one person to another she devoted herself in her attempts to save all the relations of her two friends; the mother-in-law of the Princesse de Poix, the Maréchale de Beauvau, her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse Charles de Noailles (Nathalie de Laborde), the brother of Mme. de Simiane, the abbé Damas, the whole of Malouet's family, and even those who were but distant connections, such as Mme. de Laborde, the wife of the banker who had been so well known at court, and the Vicomtesse de Laval. She placed at their service her warm-hearted ingenuity, her own friends, and that which was not a small favour at a time when money was scarce, her own fortune. At the same time M. Necker's property had been confiscated as property belonging to emigrants. He had left two millions of francs in the treasury, and it was declared that this belonged to the nation; an official notice was pasted outside the gates of Saint Ouen bearing the words, *Bien national à vendre.* These two

acts of such gross injustice against M. Necker (for as he had never renounced his claim to be considered as a Swiss citizen he could not be considered as an emigrant) had perhaps been provoked by the *Mémoire* that he had published in defence of the King. As soon as the news of the incarceration of Louis XVI. in the Temple had reached Coppet, M. Necker thought that he, as the late minister of the King, as one who had assisted him in his conscientious efforts, ought to raise his voice and give his testimony in favour of the monarch. This defence put forth by M. Necker contains some fine passages, and it obtained a considerable success, but more especially outside France. "M. Necker's *Mémoire*," Gibbon wrote, "has had a widespread and a well-deserved success. Those parts where he attempts to reason, and those where he attempts to appeal to our feelings, appear to me equally good, and his insinuating eloquence is of a kind that will persuade." But this *Mémoire* did not convince M. Necker's enemies any more than it had convinced those who sat in judgment on Louis XVI., and the interdiction that political passion had placed upon Coppet was not suspended.

But this constant manifestation of ill-will did not at all weaken the interest of the inhabitants of Coppet for the august prisoners in the Temple, nor did it discourage

their sterile efforts to rouse in their favour the compassion of the public. When the trial of the Queen began, Mme. de Staël felt as boiling in her veins all those feelings of strong indignation that would naturally rise prominent in a woman's heart. Full of her passion she wrote in a few days her short paper bearing the title, *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine*, heedless of the influence that this publication might have upon the complaint urged by M. Necker against the confiscation of his property. After she had spoken in defence of the Queen and of her conduct since the day she arrived in France, Mme. de Staël continues, in describing her sufferings since the first outbreak of the Revolution, and she thus draws a picture of what her condition was since the commencement of her captivity :—

While the King's trial lasted, every day brought upon his family a new cause of bitterness. On both days previous to the last one he left his prison, and the Queen, still a captive, unable to learn what was passing in men's minds or in that of the Assembly, bid him three times farewell, each time thinking that she would see him no more. At length the relentless day arrived. He who had become bound closer to her through the ties of misfortune, the protector, the hostage of her fate and of that of her children, that man whose courage and whose kindness seem to have acquired a double force at the approach of death, said to his wife, to his celestial sister, to his children, an everlasting farewell. The unhappy family still clung to him. The cries were heard by their neighbours, and the father, the

ill-fated husband, was constrained to push them from him. After this last effort he walked towards his executioner, and the fortitude he showed has since been judged to be an honour to religion, and an example to all mankind. That evening the prison-gates were not opened, and the event, which had taken place and had become noised all over the world, fell with especial severity upon those two solitary and unhappy women, who were upheld only by the thought that the fate of their husband and their brother was also awaiting them. No respect, no pity was shown to them in their misery; they gave each other help in their misfortune by appealing to their pride to stand by them and succour them in their misfortune. Whilst outrages were every day being committed, they maintained a calm and subdued demeanour, and their guardians thought it prudent to change constantly the soldiers who were placed to take charge over them. The most hardened men were chosen for this office, lest the Queen and the members of her family should attempt to win the favour of the people whom the authorities wished to keep alienated one from the other.

From the painful moment of the King's death, the Queen gave greater proofs, if it were possible, of the love she bore to her children. During her son's illness there was no care that her anxious solicitude allowed her to spare for the boy. It seemed as though she had need to behold hourly those creatures which were still left to her; and yet the day came when her son was taken from her! Ah! how were you able on your fête day on the 10th of August to put upon the stones of the Bastille inscriptions proclaiming the righteous horror of those torments that were suffered inside its walls. On some stones were written the sorrows for long captivity; on others, isolation, the uncharitable want felt by those who were penniless. And do you not think that the words, *They took the son away from the mother*, will not efface all recollection of those memories you wish to preserve?

It is hardly probable that in the close confinement in which she was guarded by her jailers, Marie Antoinette

knew of this defence undertaken in her favour, by a woman to whom she had at first shown some favours, but whom she at last looked upon as one of her enemies. If it be, however, that she saw these lines that I have just quoted, if she had even known how thoroughly her sorrows as queen, as a woman, and as a mother, were understood and sympathised with, she would, we may be quite sure, feel some regret at the unmeasured tones in which she spoke of Mme. de Staël in her correspondence with Fersen. It is one of the sad results of troubled times that two natures equally sincere, high-minded, and generous, should be driven so far to misunderstand each other.

Were it not for the constant anxiety in which they were kept for the safety of those in whom they took so much interest, the daily routine of life would have become singularly calm to the inhabitants of Coppet. Sometimes the news of what was passing on the other side of the frontiers of the Canton of Vaud would break in upon them and disturb the monotony of their thoughts. One evening as they were at table they were much startled at seeing a French officer in uniform rush suddenly into the room. They all jumped up, and after some questioning they recognised General de Montesquiou,[1]

[1] Anne Pierre, Marquis de Montesquiou Fezenac (born in 1741, died in 1798), had been sent as a deputy by the nobility to the Constituent Assembly. He was also a member of the French Academy.

who, sent at the head of a body of French soldiers to occupy Savoy, was flying from his own army, for the Convocation had despatched a company to arrest them. He had jumped into a small boat, and crossing the lake, had come to Coppet for refuge. But he left them on the following day; and their peaceful quietude was no longer disturbed, even by the occasional visits of Gibbon. At the beginning of the year 1794, Gibbon, then unwell, had left Lausanne to rejoin his friend, Lord Sheffield, who had just lost his wife, and a few months after his arrival in England he was seized with a dangerous illness and died. This death of one of their own friends, added to the mourning they felt for what was happening in France, cast a melancholy gloom over the inhabitants of Coppet. Mme. de Staël thus expresses herself in a letter to her husband:—

> This poor Gibbon, of whom you have heard me speak as the only man who could feel an attachment for Switzerland, has just died in England. A Mme. de Saint Leger, whom you have seen at M. d'Hauteville's, a young handsome woman, has also died suddenly. We are astonished to hear of people dying except by the French Revolution! But when one reflects that it is only this additional weight thrown into the balance, that death from natural causes still pursues its way, we become more sombre and more melancholy than usual.

At length a ray of hope broke through this atmosphere of gloom, and the news of the 9th of Thermidor

reached the banks of the Lake of Geneva. Twenty years after the event, Mme. de Staël could still describe the joy they felt at the news, and the sudden change from despair to hope:—

One of the reflections that struck us most forcibly during our long promenades on the banks of the Lake of Geneva, was the contrast between that beautiful nature surrounding us on every side, the sun giving us brightness and warmth at the end of June, with the crazy madness of man, the prince of the earth, who would wish that each one should wear his own mourning. This discouragement had mastered us. The younger we were, the less did we feel resigned; for in youth people ought to be happy. We think that we hated the right, and we revolt at the idea of not being able to find that for which we are longing. But it was at that moment, as we were looking at the heavens, at the flowers, that we were reproaching them because they gave light and sweetness to the air, amid so much mournfulness. It was at that moment that one moment of happiness was approaching. A day, of which the new name will, perhaps, be a puzzle to foreigners, the 9th of Thermidor, brought into the heart of French people an emotion of undefinable joy. Our poor human nature has never felt such lively pleasure as at the cessation of pain.

The fall of Robespierre was not only the end of that reign of shame and of blood that was hanging over France, it also brought to Coppet certain news that those friends who were dear to them would soon regain their liberty. Mme. de Poix and Mme. de Simiane had not wished to run the dangers incident to an attempt to escape, and their patience proved in the long run to have been a wiser course than would have proved the

devices of their friends. In a last letter to the Princesse d'Hénin, Mme. de Staël was much delighted with hope, though it would seem that she could not altogether place full confidence in it :—

LAUSANNE, *8th August.*

I have received your nice letters, my dear Princess, in which all your anxiety is shown with so much truth. I am glad to think that you are now less tormented, for it is impossible that you do not know that we may hope for a less cruel government since the death of Robespierre, who had reached to the highest pitch of wickedness. They say that several prisoners are released, and I attribute the lateness of the return of my messenger from the young lady to the endeavour made in favour of *natural means.* This is my news. A letter from my young friend, dated the 27th of July, the eve of the day of the crisis, tells me that everything has arrived, that is to say the messenger from the young lady, the messenger from the infirm one, and the courier who took the letter of credit for forty thousand livres, for the *interest* of Charles. He also sends me these words only by the post: *Do not be uneasy as to the fate of your friends.* This language is very different to that in the letter which brought me news of the dangerous situation of Nathalie (the Comtesse Charles de Noailles). Since then one of the messengers wrote to his wife, on the 30th of July, after the death of Robespierre, *I hope to bring my merchandise.* My Swiss friend tells me that in three or four days he will send away my courier for the interest of Charles. He ought to be here now, I was waiting for him to write to you; but as he has not come, and as this revolution as to Robespierre has happened in the meanwhile, I conclude that they have changed their tactics.

I cannot believe that our friends have changed their opinions, because of this small ray of hope; such absurd confidence would drive me into a rage of despair. This is not the time to send a

new express to teach American precautions. My friend has at this moment in his service three messengers and two women; that is just sufficient. I have questioned him as to the *old friend;* that is the only letter I have sent him by the post. I have sent him to Bâle, and I have borrowed another hand. I must, therefore, wait until the messenger sent for Charles comes back. But we may now be more easy in our minds. Not being able to assassinate more, *they* will assassinate less; that is in the nature of pride.

Do not reproach yourself, my dear Princess, that you are not here. I should be happier; but my heart cannot love more than it cherishes your angelic friend. Adieu, adieu. Not a moment will be lost in writing to you.

This outburst of joy was indeed necessary to brighten up for a moment the sombre atmosphere hanging over Coppet. Misfortune, which for some months past had been brooding in this house, had at last come to a climax, and (to preserve an energetic expression of Mme. de Staël's) death continuing to make its daily rounds, had at last laid its hand upon Mme. Necker. If, as I would fain hope, the result of this book, already too long, has inspired my readers with any interest for her, they will pardon me for saying a few words more as to her last years.

CHAPTER X.

MADAME NECKER'S LAST YEARS.

MME. NECKER had never been a woman whose health was strong, and Tronchin, when questioned by M. Necker, did not hesitate to state as his opinion that very much of the evil dated from the time of her mother's death. "The very great sorrow," he wrote, when consulted in the matter, "she felt at the loss of her admirable mother, whom she loved beyond all expression, was the main cause of the alteration in her health. She used to spend her whole nights in crying, and the time which nature had intended for sleep she passed in weeping." The intensity of feeling, that Mme. Necker always had to the end of her life, was the real cause of the premature exhaustion of her strength. In those letters that were written to her by friends who were really fond of her, the sage words of counsel, "Take care of yourself," occur with very constant repetition. But no woman thought less of herself than she.

She gave up herself and her time to her husband, to her daughter, to the poor, to her household duties, to the claims that society made upon her, to intellectual conversation, to correspondence, and to her friends. During the five years that M. Necker was first in office the strain upon her was very great. For besides the ceaseless bustle brought about by that which she herself used to call "the pleasant life at the Control Office," she had to bear up against the attacks made, and the slander cast, upon her husband,—and from these attacks even she herself did not wholly escape. She was not a woman well fitted to bear the asperities of public life, and it is not impossible that she may have had her influence in that irritation and that discouragement which her husband felt, and which made him resign his office.

The rebound of these emotions also told upon Mme. Necker's health, and during the following years she passed through a terrible crisis, which was the cause of much fear to her friends, and she herself thought that her last days were then approaching. She was ordered to leave Saint Ouen and go farther away from Paris, to Marolles, near Fontainebleau, where she would have perfect rest. It was from there she wrote her words of counsel to her daughter, which, perhaps, have not been forgotten by the reader. But the anguish caused by

the fear that she was about to leave a daughter whose lot in life was not yet determined, was as nothing compared to the torment she felt at her expected separation from her husband. The beginning of a letter she wrote to M. Necker, relating to certain questions of property which would have to be arranged after her death, will show what was the sentiment predominating in her mind :—

Before I begin this letter, my dear friend, I must reassure myself against the feeling of horror and of terror that my own thoughts give me. Let me say, then, in order to keep my mind unembarrassed, that the very slight difference in our ages cannot compensate for the weakness of my temperament and the diminution of the sources of life, caused by extreme affliction, and by all the interior torments of a sensitive heart. And when I turn my thoughts towards that all-wise Being who has planted in my soul such a constant, and such a strong love for you, it seems to me that he will grant the prayer that I make to him every morning. It seems to me that he will have pity on my weakness, and that he will judge that this heart in which you reign with such power could not bear more trouble or despair. Forgive me, oh! my friend. This is, perhaps, the only time in life in which I have preferred myself to you. But I confess to you that I pray to my Lord, to the God whom I adore, and whom I have served unceasingly since my youngest days, I pray to him, I conjure him, to let me die before you, and that I may die in your arms. God alone can judge of the degree of misery his creatures can bear; you know what sentiment accompanies this prayer, and I do not think my request will be denied to me.

Mme. Necker was able to overcome this feeling of horror so far as herself to give minute directions as to

her last wishes. Among the voluminous papers that she left to her husband there were many that he thought to be deserving of especial care. In the notice that Mme. de Staël wrote of the private life of M. Necker, she has spoken of her mother's last wishes, but she has not, perhaps, mentioned all that was interesting or pathetic in their strange many-sidedness. A few more intimate details will show how this woman, apparently so cold, and who, it seemed, regulated the actions of her life by rule and by compass, was, nevertheless, governed by strong passions and by too keen susceptibilities.

During those years when she had directed that hospital which now bears her name, Mme. Necker had been singularly struck by the danger that might accrue from over-hasty burials. The law in those days was not so stringent in its provisions—which are yet perhaps not quite severe enough—with regard to burials as it has since become. It was not without much trouble that Mme. Necker succeeded in making those men and women who performed the duties of the hospital under her orders, take such precautions as we now consider the most elementary. The necessity for these precautions had struck her so strongly that she published a little pamphlet entitled *Des Inhumations Précipitées*, and at the end she put forth a plan of which many of the propositions are now generally followed.

It was natural enough that she wished to guard herself against that danger which she was constantly afraid might happen to others. It was one of her fears that she might be buried alive, and her last wishes were that the funeral service to be read over her might be deferred until the last moment, so that there should be no longer any possible doubt as to her death. But this was not all. The inevitable destiny of the human body confined to the earth, that destiny which Bossuet has described in such precise terms in the funeral oration upon Madame, the Duchesse d'Orléans, caused to Mme. Necker a feeling of invincible horror. She wished that by one of those modes which were so common among the people in ancient times, the terrestrial form should be indefinitely preserved from mortal decay. In a word, she passionately desired that her body should be embalmed and that it should lie under a monument, and that her face should remain uncovered. This strange desire was not caused only by a repugnance that was altogether physical, it was also to be explained by a strange wish, and all the more singular as this was the wish of a woman who had such a strong faith in the immortality of the soul, and who also believed in a sort of mysterious communication between the dead and the living. She also wished with equal ardour that M. Necker's remains should be treated

in the same way as her own, that they should one day be laid in the same monument, so that an union that had been so close should not be severed even by death. This idea had long been forming itself in her mind; we find the first trace of it in a letter written not more than ten years after her marriage. After she had explained to her husband in somewhat vague terms what her wishes were in case of her death, she adds these words: "I conjure you not to neglect these details; do exactly as I tell you. It may be that my soul will wander round about you. It may be that I shall taste the delight of seeing you perform with exactness all the desires of her who loves you so fondly. It may be that if in another life I should be susceptible of any pain, my heart, from which death could not wipe out the image, would grieve at your negligence, and would suffer at finding that it was less strongly cherished." But when the advance of years, the approach of old age, the breaking up of her health, had brought the idea of death nearer to her mind, this idea became a sort of oppression. She was constantly writing fresh directions, adding new details, and directing that more precautions should be taken. She prescribed the interior of the monument that she wished to have raised to her in the park at Saint Ouen; and she was very urgent in the instructions to her husband

that her last wishes should be respected. Of these instructions I will choose one item, and on the back of the paper she wrote: "To be opened during my agony or immediately after my death"; and it begins:—

Read, my dear friend, without trouble and with deep attention the task which remains to you to fulfil; this body which is still with you has need of your care, and the soul that was in it may still often find itself with you and again enjoy your affection.

Mme. Necker then entered into minute details as to what was to be done as to the interior disposition of the monument, the way in which she wished to be laid, and then she added:—

You will cause to be made in this wall an iron gate, of which you alone will have the key, and this gate will serve to admit your body when you will be no more. You will be borne on to the same bed so that your ashes may be mixed with mine, observing the same precautions, but with this difference only, that you ordain that the iron gate shall be closed one month after your death, so that we remain alone together. Take good care as to whom you confide to execute your last wishes. So that we be not separated you must entail Saint Ouen, lest the property be sold, or if you prefer your property in Switzerland, and wish rather to transfer my remains there in a tomb such as I have described, I do not oppose it; but recollect that we are to be united on earth and in heaven, and that you perform my last desires. This heart which was yours and which still beats for you, desires that you respect its two weaknesses, the fear of being buried without being dead, and that of being separated from you.

A few months of complete rest at Montpellier, the recollection of which place had always been pleasant

to her, because she had there brought together and made acquainted the friend of her girlhood, and her chosen friend in her later life, Moultou and Thomas, and also the care shown to her by a physician then well known, a Dr. Lamurre, succeeded in making her regain her strength, and giving to her at least an appearance of good health. But this temporary amelioration was not proof against the troubles and the annoyances she experienced during the second time her husband was in office. From the impression that the miserable attacks of Bourboulon had formerly made upon her, we may judge how much she had afterwards to suffer from the insults, the calumny, and the storm of abuse that for eighteen months was poured out upon M. Necker. When she reached Coppet she was very seriously ill, and two or three days after her arrival her life was for some time in danger. But she escaped, and a deceitful hope buoyed up those who watched her progress. But she herself was not deceived by any such hope. Those minute directions that she had given as to her dead body, and her earnest request that her last wishes might be respected, were now rendered void because of her change of residence into a new country. Saint Ouen could no longer be her graveyard, and the monument that she had wished to be raised for herself and for her husband, could not be raised under the lime trees inside

its park. She had to give fresh directions, and she set about doing so with the feverish haste of one who feels that his days are counted, holding direct communication with the doctors, and with the architects, not shrinking from any detail, however painful it might be, and performing her work with a precision and a calmness that astonished all those with whom she came into contact. Her instinct did not betray her, for at the beginning of the year 1792 she relapsed into a state the gravity of which could not be hidden from any one.

The condition of mind natural perhaps to sick persons had given her a dislike to Coppet, and she was taken to Rolle, where she stayed for a considerable length of time. It was from there that she wrote a farewell letter to her husband, which was no doubt read by M. Necker after her death:—

ROLLE, 12*th November*, 1792.

You are weeping, dear friend of my heart, you think that she lives only for you, she who had joined all the points of her existence to yours. You are deceiving yourself. This God who had joined our two hearts, this God the benefactor of all his creatures, who loaded me with his favours, has not annihilated my being. As I write this letter a sentiment that has never deceived me throws a sudden calm over my soul. I think I see that this soul will yet watch over your fate, and that in the bosom of God, of this God whom I will never cease worshipping and whom I prefer to everything, even to you, I shall enjoy the affection that you bear to me. . . . But you, this attachment which I feel for every particle of your existence, this sentiment

which made me join my self-love with yours, that fear which froze all my blood whenever I saw you in any danger, this second life that I found by your side, my inmost being filled in some measure by yours—all these will never come to you again, and they will deserve from you a recognition on the other side of the grave. You will see how sure my soul is of yours because I will risk to give you orders, counting upon the hold that my love has upon you.

She then gave afresh minute orders as to the execution of her last wishes. She insisted upon her passionate wish that one day the mortal remains of her husband should be laid with hers, and she entreated M. Necker to grant her this request:—

My friend, have pity upon my weakness. I cannot bear the idea of death except with that of your life. When I reflect that you will think of your friend, the gulf closes its mouth, the horror ceases, and I feel only to be in your arms. And with what delight do I read these dear lines that you send me. What thanks do I not give to Divine Providence! He knows the hearts that he has made. He knew that mine was too sensitive to be alone even in the grave. Live therefore for many years after me to take from me the pain of death, and that this hope may free me from that anguish which sometimes preys upon me. Prolong my existence, dear friend; as long as you are upon this earth I will be here also. You will pray to God with me; you will act with me; you will think with me; and if you will tell yourself that every hour of your life gives happiness to your friend, it seems to me that your life ought to be dear to you. I will not say more. Oh! how many thoughts make their way into my heart, and how much it costs me even to make you read these lines! My friend, drive all these ideas from you. Let us work together to do the will of the Sovereign Being; but take care of my double life; you know what I am expecting.

To these very particular instructions, by which Mme. Necker endeavoured to give her husband an interest in his life, giving him duties to perform for her sake, she had also joined a formal testament. This will was written some months later, for it bears the date of the 6th of January, 1794, and it was written by Mme. Necker herself at Lausanne. She had been brought there to be nearer within the reach of the celebrated Doctor Tissot. After she wrote her will Mme. Necker never wrote another line. The handwriting is trembling, and is almost illegible. We feel that death is close at hand, behind the door, waiting only to come in. Her will is, in point of fact, but a fresh entreaty to her husband; for the very small sum which she had brought to M. Necker upon her marriage was much less than the legacies she desired to make. And though she made provision for all those who had been attached to her, and those who had taken care of her, her waiting-women, her poor people both at St. Ouen and in Paris, distant family relations whom she had assisted in Switzerland or abroad, she reproached herself that she was taking money "from one for whom," she said, "I would give my blood for his food, and who so engrosses my power of loving on this earth that no one else can come near to my heart." This same feeling again got the better of her towards the end of her will,

and she could not restrain herself from addressing to her husband a last farewell:—

Adieu, soul of my life, after having received so much from you during my lifetime it will be sweet to me to receive again your good gifts after my death. May you soften the sorrow of my loss by your submission to the Supreme Will, and by the idea that one of us two being obliged to go before the other, I was not in a condition to be able to bear your loss, the mere thought of which produced such a revolution in me that you yourself could not have endured the horror of finding me in such a state. My dear friend, I press you a thousand times against my heart. Nothing can express the sentiments in which my soul is enveloped. Adieu, well-beloved of my affectionate heart.

This affectionate heart had not very many more days to beat. The last months of Mme. Necker's life were passed in cruel suffering. Fearful thoughts troubled her at night, and took from her all chance of sleep. Sometimes, when worn down by fatigue, she would suddenly fall asleep, her head resting upon her husband's arm. "I have seen my father," Mme. de Staël says, "remain motionless for hours together, standing up and without changing his position for fear of waking her by the slightest movement." Sometimes, on the other hand, when rest refused to come to her, she sought for some solace to her sufferings in her love for music. Mme. de Staël one evening went to the piano at her mother's request, and began to sing by chance the fine air of *Œdipus Colonnus*, by Sacchini:—

Elle m'a prodigué sa tendresse et ses soins;

but she was obliged to stop when she saw the emotion which the too close connection of these sad words with his present affliction caused to her father. Until the eve of Mme. Necker's death the sound of instruments in a neighbouring room soothed her sufferings and her great pain. The sentiment which gave her some solace in this melancholy pleasure was not however of that kind which prompted these sad and charming verses:—

Vous qui veillerez sur mon agonie,
Ne me dites rien;
Faites que j'entende un peu d'harmonie
Et je mourrai bien.

Je suis las des mots, je suis las d'entendre
Ce qui peut mentir;
J'aime mieux les sons qu'au lieu de comprendre
Je n'ai qu'à sentir,

Une mélodie où le cœur se plonge,
Et qui, sans efforts,
Me fera passer du sommeil au songe,
Du songe à la mort.

Madame Necker's belief in words and in divine promises had never been firmer. She did not, it is true, lift herself up to the height of those mystic joys which may seem admirable in the eyes of ecstatic faith, but which are grated by the touch of nature. "I fear death,"

she said to her husband, "for with you I was fond of life." When M. Necker was not in her room, she prayed aloud to God, little thinking that her husband, who was in the next room and heard her cries through the window, was joining his prayers to her own. During the last hours of her life she became so weak that her voice failed her; she would then look upwards towards heaven, or at her husband, stretching out to him occasionally her left hand, on which she wore a ring that he had given her, and on which ring was engraved some few words of tenderness. At last death came, and she died calmly on the 6th of May, 1794. As a last reminiscence, M. Necker caused to be drawn hurriedly a pencil sketch which still exists, and in front of which many of these pages have been written. Madame Necker is represented as lying upon her bed, with closed eyes, like those statues which artists in the middle ages used to place upon the tombstones. The majesty of death has imprinted upon her features that twofold character which she maintained all through her life—nobility and rigidness. At the bottom of the drawing are written these identical words : *Not lost, but gone before.*

It is needless to say that M. Necker was very exact in carrying out the last wishes of his wife. Mme. Necker's body was buried at Coppet, in the monument

which had been prepared by her orders, and which her husband could see from his study windows. Since her death this monument has been opened only twice; the first time ten years afterwards to lay there the body of M. Necker, and the second time to lay there the body of Mme. de Staël. This door is now irrevocably sealed, and it is covered over by a bas-relief worked by the chisel of Canova. The great artist has represented Mme. de Staël on her knees weeping before the tomb of her parents, whilst her father, drawn towards heaven by her mother, holds out his hand to her to wish her a last farewell. Since the commencement of this century the trees that M. Necker planted round about the monument have grown up, and they now overshadow the monument and cover the approaches to it in silence and in obscurity. As one penetrates into this place of refuge, full of mournful recollections, but of none of horror, one is tempted to repeat the words pronounced by Luther, as he walked along by the side of the walls of the cemetery at Worms, *Beati quia quiescunt.* And yet, it is not the rest, the dull rest expected on the other side of the awful passage, by those whom their faith has taught to look for either a reward or endless condemnation. But even for those who have in them none of this feeling of hope mingled with fear,

does there not come upon them a sort of wonder at the thought of the refuge under a peaceful tomb; and is it not this idea that has inspired the poet with the idea of bold melancholy when he has said: To enjoy the charm of death?

INDEX.

A

Académie des Eaux, the, its origin, functions, and first president, i. 27-30
Academy, the French, account of, and its doings, i. 180; crowns M. Necker's *Éloge de Colbert*, ii. 118
Aigues Mortes, ii. 93
Aix, the Archbishop of, 130 and *n.*; his letters to Mme. Necker, ii. 131
Angeviller, M. d', notice of, and of his *liaison* with Mme. de Marchais, 245 and *n*
Annonces et Bans de l'Église philosophique, i. 112, 308
Antoinette, Marie, her position when M. Necker first took office, ii. 103; state of public feeling regarding her, 162; her kindness to Mme. de Staël, 164; and the advice she gave her, 166; Mme. de Staël's plan for the escape of, 228
Archives, the, at Coppet Castle, i. 1-7; reflections of the author while engaged amidst, 2-7
Argenson, Marquis de, notice of, i. 182 *n*
Arnould, Sophie, actress, notice of, ii. 233 *n*
Art d'Aimer, L', i. 115 *n*
Artois, the Comte d', his affair with M. Necker, ii. 106-108
Avenches, a town in the Canton of Vaud, a family of the name of Curchodi said to have dwelt in, in the year 450, i. 9; its archæological remains, 9 *n*
Aventicum, see Avenches.
Averne, Mme. d', i. 221
Ayen, the Duchesse d', notice of, her home life, and of her five daughters, i. 234 and *n*

B

Bailly, Sylvain, notice of, i. 182 *n*
Bans et Publications de l'Église philosophique, i. 112, 308
Barmécides, Les, La Harpe's tragedy of, ii. 123 *n*
Barthélemy, the Abbé, notice of, i. 229 and *n*
Bayle, Pierre, notice of, ii. 201
Beaumarchais et son Temps, Loménie's ii. 57 *n*
Beaumont, Christophe de, Archbishop of Paris, ii. 127; his friendship for Mme. Necker, 133
Beauregard, the Castle of, ii. 208
Beauvau, Mme. de, i. 217; notice of, 225
Beauvau, the Maréchale de, notice of, ii. 54 *n.*; her portrait drawn by Germaine Necker, 55, 56
Bernard, Joseph Pierre, notice of, i. 115 *n*

Berne, their Excellencies of, and M. Necker, ii. 206
Besenval, Baron de, notice of, i. 207 and *n*
Bijoux Indiscrets, Les, Diderot's, i. 154 *n*
Blesseau, Mlle., notice of, i. 304 and *n*
Boisgelin, Cucé de, Archbishop of Aix, ii. 128
Bonaparte's prodigious force of will, admiration of Necker for, ii. 180
Bonheur des Sots, Necker's, i. 167
Bonneval, Mme., notice of, i. 213
Bonstetten, Charles Victor de, notice of, i. 88 *n*
Bonstetten, La Vie de, i. 88
Borde, M. de la, notice of, ii. 81 and *n*
Borex, a town in the Canton of Vaud, i. 39 *n*
Bossuet's funeral oration on the Duchesse d'Orléans, ii. 259
Boufflers, the Comtesse de, notice of, i. 211, 212
Bouillon, the Duchesse de, i. 217 *n*
Bourboulon, the Sieur, writes a pamphlet against M. Necker, ii. 139
Bourgeois, explanation of the term in the political language of Geneva, i. 272 and *n*
Boutin, M., i. 129
Brancles, Mme. de, notice of, i. 104 *n*
Breakfast service, the china, presented by Prince Henry of Prussia to Buffon, the story of, i. 300, 305, 306
Broglie, the Comtesse de, i. 211 *n*
Broglie, the Duchesse de, daughter of Mme. de Staël, i. 6 *n*
Buffon, the Comte de, account of, and of his friendship for, and correspondence with, Mme. Necker, i. 279-306; his wife and son, 279, 280 *n*.; his first meeting with Mme. Necker, 281; his letters to her, 285-299; his religious opinions, 294-298; his last days, 301-303; and death, 304; his legacy to Mme. Necker, 305; his letter to her, ii. 125
Buffon, M. Nadault de, possessor of an engraving of a portrait of Mme. Necker, i. 15 *n*
Buffon, the Chevalier de, son of the great Buffon, notice of, i. 280 and *n*
Burke, Edmund, ii. 130 *n*

C

Calonne, M. de, notice of, ii. 147 *n*.; his attack on Necker, 167; does more harm to the monarchy than the wars of Louis XIV., 171, 172
Cambise, the Comtesse de, notice of, i. 211 *n*
Canova, the tomb of Mme. Necker adorned by a bas-relief from the chisel of, ii. 269
Caraccioli, the Marquis, notice of, i. 168 and *n*
Castle of Beauregard, the, ii. 208
Castle of Otranto, Walpole's, i. 224 *n*
Castries, Marquis de, notice of, ii. 155 *n*
Catherine II. of Russia, her correspondence with Grimm, i. 134; parallel between her mode of government and that of M. Necker, 146; her remarks on the first French Revolutionists, 148; and on the treatment of Necker, ii. 123, 147
Cepoy, Françoise de, notice of, i. 280 *n*
Cerutti, Joachim, his letter to Mme. Necker regarding her husband, ii. 193 *n*., 194
Charity, the Sisters of, first employed by Mme. Necker, ii. 135 *n*
Charrière, Madame de, notice of her life and works, i. 23 *n*.; extract from her *Lettres écrites de Lausanne*, 23
Chastellux, the Chevalier de, notice of, and of his works, i. 249, 250 and *n*, 256
Château de Madrid, a residence of M. Necker's, i. 113
Château de Novient, i. 257
Château de Saint Ouen, a residence of M. Necker's, i. 113, 256
Chénier, André, ii. 90 *n*
Chérin, Bernard, genealogist and historiographer, notice of, i. 9 *n*

Chevrette, La, i. 256
China breakfast service presented by Prince Henry of Prussia to Buffon, the story of, i. 300, 305, 306
Choiseul, the Duc de, Germaine Necker's judgment on, ii. 56; notice of, 76; his efforts on behalf of Versoix, 76 and *n*; his letter to M. Necker, 80; his retirement from the ministry, 84
Choiseul, the Duchesse de, i. 227; her letters to M. Necker, ii. 85
Cicé, Champion de, Archbishop of Bordeaux, ii. 128 and *n*
Clarion, Mlle., the actress, notice of, i. 171; her readings at M. Necker's, 177
Clugny, M. de, notice of, ii. 89 and *n*
Compte Rendu, M. Necker's, ii. 99; favourably received by the ablest men in France, 110, 118
Comtesse de Chazelles, La, the play of, ii. 43 *n*
Confessions, Les, Rousseau's, i. 189, 206, 208, 254
Confrèrie des Gentilshommes de la Cuiller, the association of, ii. 199 *n*
Conseil d'État, nature and functions of the, ii. 92 *n*
Considérations sur la Révolution Française, Mme. de Staël's, ii. 73
Contes Moraux, Marmontel's, i. 118
Conversation, Mme. Necker's remark as to what ladies are in, i. 187
Coppet Castle, the Archives at, i. 1-7; reflections of the author while engaged in, 6; past and present possessors of, 6 *n*; Gibbon's visits to, 74; history of, ii. 198 *et seq.*; connection of the Comtes de Dohna with the, 200; Bayle resides at, for some time, 201; in the deed of sale of, it was stipulated that no Catholic could become possessor, 204; description of the, as bought by Necker, 207; the external condition of the, unchanged for 100 years, 209; the life led by the Necker family there, 211-254
Correspondance inédite de Buffon, i. 279 *n*
Correspondance Littéraire, Grimm's, i. 129, 133
Correspondant, Le, a magazine, ii. 72 *n*
Correvon, M., a rejected lover of Mme. Necker's, i. 87, 95, 96; letter from, 97
Coston, M. de, on the origin of the family of d'Albert de Nasse, i. 11 *n*
Council of Sixty, in Geneva, ii. 63 *n*
Council of Two Hundred, in Geneva, ii. 63 *n*
Council, the Magnificent Little, at Geneva, ii. 75 *n*, 76, 81-83
Cramer, Philibert, notice of, ii. 79 and *n*, and 80; failure of his mission to Paris, 81-83
Crassier, or Crassy, the village of, the birthplace of Mme. Necker, i. 8, 16, 17, 20, 35 *n*, 36, 75
Créquy, the Marquise de, her letter to Necker, ii. 115-117
Creutz, the Comte de, notice of, i. 168 and *n*
Cromot, M., his effort on behalf of the Comte d'Artois, ii. 106
Cuiller, Confrèrie des Gentilshommes de la, the association of, ii. 199 *n*
Curchod family, the, claims advanced regarding the origin of, i. 9-11
Curchod, Louis Antoine, father of Mme. Necker, and minister at Crassier, i. 8; his ancestors and his antecedents, 8-10; his wife and her family, 10, 11; his influence in developing the mind of his daughter, 12, 13; his death, 77
Curchod, Suzanne; see Necker, Mme.

D

D'Alembert, notice of, i. 163 *n*; his acquaintance with Mme. Necker, 163 *et seq.*; his remark on an opera of Gluck's, 164
Deffand, Mme. du, her impression on touching Gibbon's face with her hand, i. 34; her remark regarding supper, 112; and on Marmontel, 188; her intercourse with, and letters to Mme. Necker, 221-232

Defoucene, Dariet, an admirer of Mme. Necker's, his correspondence with, and poetry addressed to her, i. 18, 19
Delille, the Abbé, notice of, i. 185 *n*
Dictionnaire Historique et Critique, Bayle's, ii. 201
Diderot, i. 4, 114, 129; his first acquaintance with Mme. Necker, 149; account of a conversation with Mme. Necker, 152-154; his letters to her, 155-161; his sketch of Catherine II. of Russia, 158; his wife and his treatment of her, 188; his letter to Mme. Necker, ii. 120
Diderot, Mme., notice of, i. 188 *n*
Dillon, Archbishop of Narbonne, ii. 128
Dohna, the Comtes de, ii. 200; account of the baptism of a daughter of one of, 200, 201
Dorat, M., notice of, and of his solicitations to Mme. Necker regarding his candidature for the French Academy, i. 183 and *n*
Droz, M., his *Histoire de Louis XVI.*, ii. 88
Ducis, Jean François, notice of, i. 312 and *n*
Duclos, M., notice of, i. 184 *n*
Duplessis, Joseph Sifrède, a French painter, notice of, and of his portrait of Mme. Necker, i. 14 *n*, 15 *n*
Dupuis et Desronais, Collé's comedy of, i. 256
Duretal, Comte de, i. 191 *n*
Dutch chapel, baptism of Germaine Necker in the, ii. 21

E

Eaubonne, i. 256
Ecritoire, M. de Sainte, a nickname playfully applied by M. Necker to his daughter, ii. 43
Éloge de Colbert, by M. Necker, i. 145 and *n*; crowned by the French Academy, ii. 118
Emery, M., notice of, ii. 101 *n*
Émile, Rousseau's, ii. 22
Emily, Portrait of, a sketch by Mme. Necker of the Duchesse de Lauzun, i. 214
Encyclopédie, the, i. 259
Enville, d', the Duchesse, notice of, and of her kindness to Mme. Necker, i. 80-82, 190; and to M. Necker, ii. 114
Epinay, d', Mme., notice of, and her *Mémoires*, i. 135 and *n*, 256; her letter to Necker, ii. 115
Époques de la Nature, Buffon's, i. 297
Erlach, d', M., magistrate at Berne, i. 81
Esprit de Caraccioli, L', Dorat's, i. 168 *n*
Essai sur l'Administration de M. Necker par lui-même, ii. 212
Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature, Gibbon's first work, i. 51
Essai sur les Femmes, extract from M. Thomas's, i. 267
Étude sur le Pouvoir exécutif dans les grands États, M. Necker's, ii. 213
Eyverdun, d', M., i. 67 and *n*

F

Felice, de, his *Histoire des Protestants*, ii. 93 *n*
Félicité Publique, La, i. 250 *n*
Fénelon, ii, 9, 10
Ferney, Voltaire's dramatic performances at, i. 63
Ferrières, the Marquis de, notice of, ii. 70 *n*
Fersen, Comte de, notice of, ii. 69 *n*
Ferté-Imbault, the Marquise de la, notice of, and of her intercourse with Mme. Necker, i. 235, 236 and *n* to 241
Fleury, M. de, ii. 146
Formier, M., notice of, ii. 224 *n*
Foulon, M., notice of, ii. 57 *n*
France, the condition of the old state of society in, ii. 72, 160
French Academy, the, account of, and its doings, i. 180; crowns M. Necker's *Éloge de Colbert*, ii. 118

G

Gageure Imprévue, La, i. 182 *n*
Galliani, the Abbé, notice of, i. 169 and *n*; becomes a *habitué* of Mme. Necker's *salon*, 169; his letters to Mme. Necker, 170, 177
Gardens, the royal, i. 281, 289, 290, 293, 301, 302
Gardes du Trésor royal, their origin and functions, ii. 87 and *n*
Geffroy, M., and his work on Gustavus III. of Sweden, ii. 61 *et seq.*
Geneva, explanations of the terms *bourgeois* and *natifs*, in the political language of, i. 272 and *n*, ii. 75 and *n*; and of the terms *négatifs* and *représentants*, 75 and *n*; political condition of, since the Reformation, 75 and *n*; the Magnificent Little Council at, *ib.*
Genlis, Mme. de, notice of, and of Lebrun's epigram on her, i. 233 and *n*; her remarks regarding the education of Germaine Necker, ii. 30, 31
Geoffrin, Mme., i. 142, 151; letter from D'Alembert regarding her last illness, 166; her character and antecedents, and intercourse with Mme. Necker, 197-206; her adopted son Stanislas Poniatowski, afterwards King of Poland, 199 and *n*; account of her daughter, Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault, and of her intercourse with Mme. Necker, 235-241
Gerbier, M., notice of, i. 195 and *n*
Gibbon's love affair with Mme. Necker, i. 31-75; a picture of him drawn by her, 34; another of her drawn by him, 35; letters from him to her, 37 *et seq.*; a copy of verses in French he addressed to her, 45; they are engaged, 46; the engagement broken by a letter from Gibbon, 52; she remonstrates with him in two impassioned letters, 55, 57; his reply, 61; her last letter to him on the subject, 63; his after-intercourse with her, 69-75; his letter to Mme. Necker on the resignation of M. Necker, ii. 144; visits her at Coppet Castle, 221; his letter to Lord Sheffield, 232; his death, 251
Gleichen, Baron de, notice of, ii. 69 and *n*
Gluck, Christopher, notice of, i. 121 *n*, 145
Golowkin, Count Féodor, a friend of Gibbon's, notice of, i. 69 *n*; extract from a letter in his collection, 104
Gouvernement, Le, les Mœurs, et les Condition en France avant la Révolution, Meilhan's, ii. 71 *n*
Gramont, the Duchesse de, notice of, ii. 57 *n*
Grétry, M., notice of, i. 145 and *n*
Grimm, Frédéric Melchoir, his remark regarding Mme. Necker's dinners, i. 112; his intercourse with and letters to Mme. Necker, 133-148; his parallel between the modes of government employed by Catherine II. of Russia and M. Necker, 146; letters to Mme. Necker, ii. 121, 123
Guerre de Genève, La, Voltaire's, ii. 20 *n*
Guibert, Comte de, notice of, i. 164 and *n*
Guines, the Duc de, notice of, ii. 104 and *n*; the incident of his daughter's marriage portion, 104
Gustavus III. of Sweden, provision made by, for the Baron de Staël-Holstein, ii. 61-66

H

HARPE, M. La, notice of, i. 251 and *n*
Haussonville, Madame la Comtesse d', Coppet Castle now the property of, i. 6 *n*
Helvétius, Claude Adrien, notice of, i. 110 *n*
Hénault, the President, notice of, i. 221 and *n*
Hénin, the Princesse d', i. 211 *n*, 217; her regard for M. Necker, ii. 114;

notice of, 233; she returns to England, 235
Hénin, the Prince d', notice of, ii. 233 *n*
Hennin, M., notice of, ii. 80 and *n*
Histoire d'Angleterre, Molleville's, ii. 70 *n*
Histoire du Canton de Vaud, Verdeil's, ii. 205 *n*
Histoire de Louis XVI., M. Droz's, ii. 88
Histoire philosophique des deux Indes, Raynal's, ii. 28 *n*
Histoire des Protestants, De Felice's, ii. 93 *n*
Histoire de la Révolution Française, Molleville's, ii. 70 *n*
Histoire Naturelle, Buffon's, i. 285
Holbach, d', Baron, notice of, i. 110 *n*
Homme d'autrefois, the Marquis de Costa's, ii. 208 *n*
Homo duplex, the, St. Paul, Racine and Buffon, on, i. 298
Hôtel Leblanc, account of the, i. 109
Houdetot, the Comtesse d', account of, and of her connection and correspondence with Mme. Necker, i. 254-266; her fondness for, and letters to, Germaine Necker, ii. 23-26
Hypatia, Voltaire's allusions to, i. 111 and *n*

I

Idole du Temple, L', origin of the nickname, i. 211 *n*
Importance des Opinions Religieuses, M. Necker's, i. 130
Inhumations Précipitées, Des, Mme. Necker's, ii. 258

J

Jacob, Canon, his letter to M. Necker, ii. 143
Janet, M., his *Les Origines du Socialisme Contemporain*, ii. 101
Jessé, the Baron de, President of the Assembly, ii. 196
Jordaens, Jacques, a Flemish painter, i. 161 and *n*
Journal of Mme. Necker, extracts from the, ii. 1-18
Just, Dugast de Bois Saint, and his reputed work, ii. 70 and *n*

L

Ladies of the order of Fudge, the association called the, i. 236
Lally, M. de, notice of, ii. 186 and *n*
Lambert, the Marquis de Saint, notice of, i. 254 and *n*, 255, 257, 258, 262, 263
Lambert, Mme. de, notice of, i. 182 *n*
Lampoon Companions, the association called the, i. 236
Lausanne, literary and social life in, when Voltaire resided there, i. 20-24; Sainte-Beuve's opinion of life at, and of its people, 21; number and nature of its inhabitants, 22; its old nobilities, 23; how they were governed and lived, 23-25; Mme. Necker's first visit to, and studies in, 25-32; the Académie des Eaux established at, 27
Lauzun, the first and second Ducs de, notice of, i. 212 and *n*
Lauzun, the Duchesse de, her character as drawn by Mme. Necker, and her intercourse with her, i. 213-220; her death, 220; her friendship for M. Necker, ii. 114
Leblanc, Claude, a French minister of state, notice of, i. 109 *n*
Lebrun, Ecouchard, the poet, his epigram on Mme. de Genlis, i. 233; 288 and *n*; his proposed inscription for a monument to Buffon, 290
Leckzinska, Marie de, ii. 111
Lecomte, Mme., notice of, and of her *liaison* with M. Watelet, and intercourse with Mme. Necker, i. 232-234
Leçons d'un Ministre d'État, i. 182 *n*
Lemière, M., notice of, i. 194 and *n*
Leon, Dufresne de, Necker's old clerk, ii. 186
Lesage, George Louis, a Swiss physician, notice of his life and works, i. 13, 14 *n*

Lesdiguières, the Duc de, notice of, ii. 199 *n*
Lespinasse, Mlle. de, notice of, i. 163 *n*; D'Alembert's letter to Mme. Necker regarding the death of, 166; letter from, to M. Necker, 167
Lessart, M. de, notice of, ii. 155 *n*
Les Suites d'une seule Faute, a little tale by M. Necker, i. 96 *n*
Letters—Gibbon to Mme. Necker, i. 37, 40, 43, 47, 52, 61, 71; Mme. Necker to Gibbon, 49, 55, 57, 63; Pasteur Moultou to Mme. Necker, 59, 60; the Duchesse d'Enville to Mme. Necker, 82; Mme. Necker to Moultou, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95; M. Correvon to Mme. Necker, 97; M. Necker to Moultou, 98; to Mme. Vermenoux, 98; to Moultou, 101; to Moultou's sister-in-law, 102; to Mme. de Braules, 104; Marmontel to Mme. Necker, 122-124; the Abbé Morellet to Mme. Necker, 130; Mme. Necker to Grimm, 135; Grimm to Mme. Necker, 136, 138, 142; Mme. Necker to Grimm, 144; Mme. Necker to Moulton, 151; Diderot to Mme. Necker, 155, 156, 158, 161; D'Alembert to Mme. Necker, 165, 166; the Abbé Galiani to Mme. Necker, 170, 173, 174; Saint-Pierre to Mme. Necker, 179; Dorat to Mme. Necker, 183; Mme. Vermenoux to Mme. Necker, 193; Mme. Geoffrin to Mme. Necker, 200, 201-206; the Duchesse de Lauzun to Mme. Necker, 216, 218; Mme. du Deffand to Mme. Necker, 226; Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault to Mme. Necker, 237-241; Mme. de Marchais to Mme. Necker, 247; Mme. Necker to Mme. de Marchais, 248, 249; Mme. d'Houdetot to Mme. Necker, 256, 257-264; Mme. Necker to Moultou, 270-277; Buffon to Mme. Necker, 283-299; M. Thomas to Mme. Necker, 310-325; Mme. Necker to M. Thomas, 320; Mme. Necker to her husband, ii. 7, 8; to Mme. Vernet, 20; Mme. d'Houdetot to Mme. Necker, 24, 25; Mme. Geulis to Mme. Necker, 31; Mme. Necker to her husband, 32; Germaine Necker to her mamma, 33, 35; Mme. Necker to her daughter, 36-38, 49; Germaine Necker to her mamma, 66; the Magnificent Little Council of Geneva to M. Necker, 77; the Duc de Choiseul to M. Necker, 80; Philibert Cramer to the Magnificent Little Council, 81; M. Necker to the same, 83; the Duchesse de Choiseul to M. Necker, 85; M. Necker to M. de Maurepas, 91; M. Cromot to M. Necker, 106; M. Necker to M. Cromot, 107; the Duc de Mouchy to M. Necker, 110; the Comte de Tressan to M. Necker, 111; Mme. d'Épinay to M. Necker, 115; the Marquise de Créquy to M. Necker, 115-117; Marmontel to Mme. Necker, 118, 119; Diderot to Mme. Necker, 120; Grimm to Mme. Necker, 121; Buffon to Mme. Necker, 125; the Bishop of Mirepoix to Mme. Necker, 129; the Archbishop of Aix to Mme. Necker, 131, 132; Vergniaud to Mme. Necker, 137; M. de Montyon to M. Necker, 140; Canon Jacob to M. Necker, 143; Mme. de Staël to her husband, 166; M. Necker to his daughter, 168; the Abbé Maury to Necker, 173; the Superioress of the Ursuline Convent of Saint Germain en Laye to Necker, 175; M. Necker to Louis XVI., 188; M. Necker to his brother, *ib.*; Mme. de Staël to the Baron de Jessé, 196; Gibbon to Lord Sheffield, 222; Mme. de Staël to her husband, 224, 231; to the Princess d'Hénin, 232, 237, 239, 244; Mme. Necker's farewell letter to her husband, 263
Lettres diverses recueillies en Suisse, i. 69 *n*
Lettres d'une Mère à sons Fils, i. 182 *n*
Levis, the Duc de, notice of, i. 209 *n*; his sketch of the Maréchale de Luxembourg, 209
Liancourt, Duc de, notice of, i. 190 *n*
Ludre, M. le Comte de, on the causes of the French Revolution, ii. 72

Loiseau, M., notice of, i. 195 and *n*
Louis XVI., Necker's testimony to the worth and innocency of, ii. 103; he sleeps at Council meeting, 182
Lullin Family, the, in Geneva, notice of, ii. 77 *n*
Luther's words on beholding the graveyard at Worms, ii. 269
Luxembourg, the Maréchale de, her history and character, i. 206; her intercourse with Mme. Necker, 209-212

M

Malouet, M., praises M. Necker in his *Memoirs*, ii. 145 and *n*
Marchais, Mme. de, i. 175; account of, and of her intercourse with, and letters to Mme. Necker, 242-253; Marmontel's opinion of her, 243; Mme. Necker's account of her friendship with, 244; her connection with M. d'Angeviller, 245; her quarrel with, and separation from Mme. Necker, 252
Marck, the Comtesse de, ii. 114
Marmontel, Jean François, his acquaintance and intercourse with Mme. Necker, and ultimate treatment of her in his *Memoires*, i. 118-127; his description of Mme. de Vermenoux, 192; his remarks on Mme. de Marchais, 243; his admiration for, and verses addressed to, Germaine Necker, ii. 28; his letters to Mme. Necker, ii. 118, 119
Marmontel, Mme., notice of, i. 188 *n*
Maurepas, M. de, his witty remark regarding the Marquis de Pezai, ii. 89
Meilhan, Sénac de, notice of, and of his abuse of M. Necker, ii. 71 and *n*; his statement regarding the author of Necker's prosperity, 88; his connection with the Marquise de Créquy, ii. 116, *n*
Meister, Jacob, story of his connection with Mme. Vermenoux, and of the bequeathal of her heart, i. 195
Mémoires, Besenval's, i. 207 *n*
Mémoires de la Marquise de Créquy, ii. 116 *n*
Mémoires de Mme. Epinay, i. 133
Mémoires, Les, secrets sur les Règnes de Louis XIV. et XV., i. 184 *n*
Mémoires, Marmontel's, i. 118, 122, 243
Mémoires, Mme. de Genlis's, i. 233, ii. 30, 31
Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de la Révolution Française, ii. 70 *n*
Memoirs, Comte de Fersen's, ii. 70
Mirabeau, the Marquis de, *l'ami des hommes*, i. 243 *n*; his interview with Necker, ii. 193; and his enmity to him, 193-195
Mirepoix, the Bishop of, letter to Mme. Necker, ii. 129
Molé, Mme. la Presidente, notice of, i. 237 and *n*
Molleville, the Marquis Bertrand de, notice of, ii. 70 *n*
Mommsen, Mr., i. 9 *n*
Monaco, Mme. de, i. 195, and *n*
Moncrif, Paradis de, a French man of letters, i. 20 and *n*
Montarget, M. de, Archbishop of Autun, i. 325 *n*
Montbard, i. 283, 284, 287, 297, 300
Montbarrey, the Princesse de, notice of, ii. 89 and *n*
Mont Dore, i. 261
Montélimart, the town of, i. 10, 11 *n*
Montesquieu's lines on Mme. de Mirepoix, i. 225
Montesquiou, General de, notice of, ii. 250
Montesson, Marquise de, notice of, ii. 43 and *n*
Montmorin, M. de, notice of, ii. 170 *n*
Montoron, a farmer-general, i. 106
Montyon, the Baron de, notice of, ii. 140
Mora, the Marquis de, notice of, i. 164 and *n*, 165
Morellet, the Abbé, notice of, i. 127; Mme. Necker's account of him, 127; his dealings with M. Necker, 128-132

Môtiers Travers, a town in the Val de Travers, once the residence of Rousseau, i. 58 *n*

Mouchy, the Duc de, his letter to M. Necker, 110 and *n*

Moultou, the Pasteur, i. 59; account of, and of his first connection with Mme. Necker, 83-85; various letters from Mme. Necker to, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 98, 101, 151, 270-277; nature of Mme. Necker's friendship for, 268; attempt made by Mme. Necker to get him appointed Minister of the Republic of Geneva in Paris, 274; his visit to Paris, 275; his death, 277; Mme. Necker's friendship continued to the family of, 278

Muet de Bagdad, Le, the play of, i. 256, 257

N

Naigeon, Jacques André, notice of, i. 152 and *n*

Nasse, d'Albert de, mother of Mme. Necker, her origin and history, i. 10, 11; her character and family, 10, 11 and *n*; her death, 77

Natifs, explanation of the term in the political language of Geneva, i. 272 and *n*

Necker, Louis Frédéric, father of M. Necker, i. 91 and *n*

Necker, Louis, brother of M. Necker, notice of, ii. 20 and *n*; letter to, 188

Necker, M. Jacques, his origin and first meeting with Suzanne Curchod, i. 91, 92; his personal appearance, 92; his offer of marriage to Mlle. Curchod, 95; *Les Suites d'une seule Faute*, a little tale which he wrote, 96 *n*; his letter to Moultou regarding his marriage, 98; influence of his large income and position on his wife's literary and social undertakings, 106-109; notes of a conversation which took place at his table, 115-117; his services to Marmontel, 124; his patronage of the Abbé Morellet, and its requital, 128-132; his *Éloge de Colbert*, 145 *n*; Mme. du Deffand's opinion of, in a letter to Horace Walpole, 227; his work on *L'Importance des Opinions Religieuses*, 301; birth of his only child, Germaine Necker, ii. 18; his overweening fondness for her, 41; his endeavours to instruct her and wean her from a literary life, 42, 43; his wife's prose portrait of him and his daughter's, 44; his refusal to decide between them, *ib.*; marriage of his daughter to the Baron de Staël-Holstein, 61-66; his *Essai sur le Commerce des Grains*, 74; causes of his rise in political life, *ib.*; and commencement of his career, 75; his appointment as Minister of Geneva at the Court of France, 77; the services he renders to Geneva, 78; his favour with the Duc de Choiseul, 80 *et seq.*; receives two letters from the Duchesse de Choiseul, 85; is thanked for the financial services he renders to France, 87; the statement regarding the author of his prosperity, 88; M. de Maurepas determines to propose him as Director of the Royal Treasury, 91; his religion deemed an obstacle, 92; at length letters-patent are made out appointing him General Director of the Royal Treasury, 94; he is presented with an inscription by the Magnificent Little Council, 96; his first term of office, 97 *et seq.*; his removal to the General Control Office, 97; his reforms and suggested reforms, 98, *et seq.*; his efforts on behalf of the poor, 100; his feelings in common with M. Turgot, 101, 102; his testimony to the worth and innocency of Louis XVI., 103; his reception by Marie Antoinette, 103-105; the incident of a marriage portion for the Duc de Guines's daughter, 104; his letter to the Duc, 105; his unfriendly treatment by various members of the royal family, 106; the affair of the Comte d'Artois, 106-108; his upright dealings make

him friends and enemies, 108 *et seq.*; letters from some of his friends, 110 *et seq.*; his female supporters and their letters, 113-117; letters from his friends and supporters among the men of letters, 118 *et seq.*; is opposed by some of the Roman Catholic clergy, 126; his friendly intercourse with the Archbishop of Paris, 135, 136; his sudden resignation, 139; having been refused a seat in the Council of State, 141; his fall attributed to the court, 143; reflections on his fall, 144; receives an offer from the King of Naples, 147; his *Traité sur l'Administration des Finances*, 149; his employment of his leisure hours, 148; extract from his *L'Importance des Opinions Religieuses*, 151; extract from his daughter's journal regarding this work, 153; and her feelings for him, 155; his controversy with Calonne, 167; receives a *lettre de cachet* to remove forty leagues from Paris—indignation of his friends, 168; recall of the *lettre de cachet*, 169; is reappointed Chief Director of Finances, 172; receives marks of public sympathy from all quarters, 173-176; his mistake in allowing the double representation to the third party, 178; is censured for having no preconceived plan to present to the States-General, 179; is thwarted by the indifference of the king, 181; accusations brought against him, 182; is insulted by the Comte d'Artois, 184; is dismissed and exiled, 185; retires to Brussels, *ib.*; and thence to Bâle, 186; is recalled to office amidst great enthusiasm, 188-190; his treatment by the Assembly, 191-193; incurs the enmity of Mirabeau, 193; his resignation, 195; is arrested while leaving the country, 196; is released, *ib.*; and retires to Coppet, 197; engages in composition, 212; his *Essai sur l'Administration de M. Necker par lui-même*, *ib.*; his *Étude sur le Pouvoir exécutif dans les grands États*, in which he shows the evils inherent to pure democracy, 213; extracts from, 214-216; his life at Coppet, and his visitors, 223; receives a visit from his daughter, *ib.*; his property is confiscated, 246; his *Mémoire* on behalf of the king, 247

Necker, Mme. (*née* Curchod), her birth and parentage, i. 8-11; her ancestors and their claims to nobility, 9, 10; her mother, and the origin of her family, 10, 11; nature of Mme. Necker's early education, 11, 12; her precocity, and the variety of her acquirements, 13, 14; her beauty and personal charms 14, 15; these strikingly displayed in her portrait by Duplessis, 14 *n*, 15 *n*; her portrait in prose by herself, 15; her reputation and admirers, 16; her correspondence with certain young ministers, 17; her most ardent admirer, and her correspondence with him, 18, 19; recollections of her youthful appearance, studies, and associates, 25, 26; named president of a literary *réunion* called the Académie des Eaux, 27; her first essays, 29; complimentary verses addressed to her, 31; Gibbon smitten with her charms, *ib.*; his own account of the affair, 35; letters and verses from him to her, 36-53, 60, 61, 71; her replies, 49, 57, 63; they are engaged, 46; the engagement broken by a letter from Gibbon, 52; she remonstrates with him in two impassioned letters, 55, 57; his reply, 61; her last letter to him on the subject, 63; her after intercourse with him, 69-75; death of her father, 76; her reduced circumstances and change of residence, 76, 77; death of her mother, 77; bitterness of her grief, 77-79; she is cheered and succoured by two friends, the Duchesse d'Enville and Pasteur Moultou, 80-85; her opinion of, and regard for,

Moultou, 84, 85; she becomes a governess, 86; she is befriended and taken to Paris by Mme. de Vermenoux, 87, 89; here she first meets her future husband, M. Necker, 92; his offer of marriage, 95; her acceptance, 96; letter from a rejected lover, 97; her marriage and change of residence, 98; her life in the Rue Michel le Comte, 100 *et seq.*; her letters to her friends describing her happiness, 101-104; effects of her husband's influence on her social and literary undertakings, 106-108; removes her residence to the Hôtel Leblanc, 109; account of her Fridays or reception days there, 110; and at the Château de Madrid and the Château de Saint Ouen, 113; her guests and their characteristics, 114-117; their conversation, 115-117; Marmontel and his treatment of her, 118-122; the Abbé Morellet's ingratitude to her, 128-132: Grimm's intercourse and correspondence with her, 132-148; Diderot's friendship for and letters to, 149-162; D'Alembert's first acquaintance with her, and its result, 163-167; some distinguished foreigners who frequented her *salon*, 168-177; she has Mlle. Clarion to give readings to her guests, 177; her acquaintance with Saint-Pierre, 178-180; her reputed power with the French Academy, 182; the ladies who frequented her *salon*, 187 *et seq.*; Mme. Vermenoux, 191-196; Mme. Geoffrin, 197-206; the Maréchale de Luxembourg, 206-211; the Duchesse de Lauzun, 212-220; Mme. Necker's correspondence with Voltaire, 222; her last opinions of Mme. du Deffand, 229-232; Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault's intercourse with her, 235-241; Mme. de Marchais, 245-253; her quarrel with, and separation from Mme. Necker, 252; her intercourse with the Comtesse d'Houdetot, 254-266; nature of Mme. Necker's friendship for Moultou, 268; her letters to him, 270-277; Buffon's friendship for, and correspondence with her, 279-306; her high opinion of him, 289; attends him in his last illness, 302; her account of his behaviour and sentiments, 303; is left a legacy in his will, 305; her friendship and intercourse with M. Thomas, 307-328; her mental peculiarities, ii. 1-3; extracts from her journal, 4-18; her idolatrous attachment to her husband, 6; letter to him, 8; prayers for comfort, 12, 13, 16; birth of her only child, Germaine, 19; its baptism and godmother, 20, 21; devotes herself to the education of her child, 31; the fond letters she receives from her child, 33-35; and addresses to her, 36-38; she is pained at the overweening fondness of her husband for her daughter, 41; her speculation regarding a husband for her, 45-48; her thoughts of Pitt as an ideal husband, 47; her daughter's repugnance to such a union, 47, 48; illness of Mme. Necker and her forebodings regarding it, 49-51; a touching scene between her daughter and herself on the occasion, 52, 53; marriage of her daughter with the Baron de Staël-Holstein, 61-66; letters from Marmontel, Diderot, Grimm, and Buffon, 118-122, 123, 125; from the Bishop of Mirepoix, 129; and the Archbishop of Aix, 131, 132; her works of charity, 135; her friendship with the Archbishop of Paris, *ib.*; receives a letter from Vergniaud, 137; her *salon* in the Rue Bergère becomes an Opposition drawing-room, 148; retires to Coppet with her husband, 197; her feeling of melancholy in retirement 217; receives a visit from Gibbon, 221; her life at Coppet and her visitors, 223; she receives a visit from her daughter, *ib.*; original delicacy of her constitution, 255; forebodings as to her health, 257; her horror of premature burial, 258;

publishes a pamphlet on the subject—*Des Inhumations Précipitées*, 258; in her feeble state she takes a dislike to Coppet and removes to Rolle, 263; a farewell letter to her husband, *ib.*; her will, 265; her last farewell to her husband, 266; influence of music in soothing her, *ib.*; her death, 268

Necker, Germaine, the only child of the Neckers, her birth, ii. 18; and baptism, 21; her childish charms and friends, 22; Mme. Genlis's remarks regarding her education, 30, 31; her fondness for her mother, and the letters she addresses to her, 33-35; and receives from her, 36-38; the fascination she exercises over her father, and his fondness for her, 39-41; the pain this inflicts upon her mother, 41; her prose portrait of her father, which she sketches in rivalry of that of her mother, 44; his refusal to decide between them, *ib.*; her mother proposes a husband, and names Pitt, 47; her refusal to consent to such a union, 47, 48; extracts from her journal—description of a touching scene between her mother and herself, 52, 53; portrait of Maréchale de Beauvau, 55; judgment on the Duc de Choiseul, 56; descriptions of her emotions and imaginary fears, 58-61; her marriage with the Baron de Staël-Holstein arranged, 61; extract from the marriage contract, 63; the solemnisation, 66; her farewell letter to her mother on quitting her house, 66. See Staël, Mme. de, for the remaining incidents

Negatifs, explanation of the term in the political language of Geneva, ii. 75 and *n*

Neuvaine de Cythère, La, Marmontel's, i. 118

Noailles, the Comtesse de, extract from her notice of the Princesse de Poix, ii. 234 and *n*, 235; and of Mme. de Simiane, 239.

Noailles, the Vicomtesse de, i. 213

Notice sur la Vie de la Duchesse d'Ayen, i. 234 *n*

Notice sur la Vie et les Écrits de Mme. de Staël, ii. 17 *n*

Nouveaux Lundis, Sainte-Beuve's, i. 211 *n*, 312

Nouvelle Heloïse, the, i. 258

O

Oberkirch, the Baroness d', notice of, i. 93 *n*

Œdipus Colonnus, Sacchini's air of, ii. 266

Œuvres agréables et morales; ou, Variétés littéraires, De Pezai's, ii. 88 *n*

Opinions Religieuses, L'Importance des, Necker's, i. 301; ii. 149 *et seq.*; extracts from his daughter's journal regarding, 153

Ormesson, M. d', ii. 147

Oudry, Jean Baptiste, a French painter, i. 158 and *n*

P

Paradox sur le Comèdien, Diderot's, i. 150

Paris, Versailles, et les Provinces au XVIII. Siècle, ii. 70 *n*

Paul et Virginie, Saint-Pierre's, i. 178

Pavilliard, M., the minister in whose house Gibbon resided at Lausanne, i. 33

Pensées et Maximes, i. 209 *n*

Pensées et Mélanges, Mme. Necker's, i. 289; ii. 44

Pétréïde, La, Thomas's, i. 249

Pezai, the Marquis de, notice of, ii. 88 and *n*; M. de Maurepas's witty remark regarding, 89; is asserted to have been the first to call Louis XVI.'s attention to M. Necker, 88

Phelipeaux, Archbishop of Bourges, ii. 128

Philosophe sans le Savoir, Le, i. 182 *n*

Pigalle, Jean Baptiste, French sculptor, i. 137 *n*

Pitt, William, Mme. Necker's ideal husband for her daughter, ii. 47; his life by Lord Stanhope, 48 *n*
Poix, Mme. de, i. 217
Poix, the Princesse de, notice of, ii. 235; she resolves not to leave Paris, 236
Polignac, the Duchesse de, ii. 187 and *n*
Polignac, Vicomte de, his letter to M. Necker, ii. 112 and *n*
"Pomona," a nickname given to Mme. de Marchais, i. 246
Poniatowski, Stanislas, King of Poland, his connection with, and friendship for Mme. Geoffrin, i. 199 and *n*
Portraits des Personnages distingués de la Fin du XVIII. Siècle, Meilhan's ii. 71 *n*
Prétentions, Les, the play of, i. 249
Prie, Mme. de, notice of, i. 109
Prince Henry of Prussia, i. 140; sends a china tea-service to Buffon, 300
Printemps, the Société du, i. 35
Propertius, a verse from, i. 291 and *n*
Protestants, bitter feeling in France against the, ii. 92
Prussia, Prince Henry of, i. 140; sends a china tea-service to Buffon, 300

Q

Quesnay, François, the physician, i. 242 and *n*

R

Raynal, the Abbé, notice of, ii. 27 and *n*
Reflexions sur le Procès de la Reine, Mme. de Staël's, extract from, ii. 248
Reformed Religion, bitter feeling in France against the, ii. 92
Religieuse, La, Diderot's, i. 154
Religieuses, L'Importance des Opinions, Necker's, i. 301; ii. 149 *et seq.*; extracts from his daughter's journal regarding, 153
Représentants, explanation of the term in the political language of Geneva, ii. 75 and *n*
Reverdil, Mme., her correspondence with Mme. Necker, ii. 134 and *n*
Rheinsberg, the Castle at, i. 140
Riccoboni, Mme., notice of, i. 116 *n*
Richard Cœur de Lion, the opera of, i. 145 *n*
Robespierre, Mme. de Staël's joy on the fall of, ii. 252
Rockingham, the Marquis of, notice of, ii. 47 and *n*
Rohan-Chabot, Duchesse de, notice of, i. 190
Rohan, Cardinal de, i. 184 *n*; the Baron de Staël on his arrest, ii. 163
Rohan, the Duchesse de, ii. 114
Rolla, i. 308
Rolle, a town in the Canton of Vaud, i. 39 *n*; Mme. Necker's visit to, ii. 263
Rousseau, i. 59; his remarks on Gibbon's treatment of Mme. Necker, 62; his *Confessions*, 189, 206, 208, 254; his account of the long promenades with the imprudent Sophie, 254
Rue Michel le Comte, the, in which was the first residence of Mme. Necker after her marriage, i. 100

S

Sainte-Beuve, his opinion of life at Lausanne and of its people, i. 21; his notices of Madame de Charrière, 23 *n*; his *Nouveaux Lundis*, i. 211 *n*, 312
Saint Germain en Laye, i. 313
Saint-Pierre, Bernardin de, notice of, i. 178; his letter to Mme. Necker, 179
Saisons, Les, Saint Lambert's, i. 254
Salon of Mme. Necker, the, influence of, on contemporary thought, i. 4, 5; the *habitues* of, and their characteristics, 114 *et seq.*; speci-

men of the conversation which took place there, 115-117; notices of four of the leading frequenters, Marmontel, 118-127; the Abbé Morellet, 127-132; Grimm, 133-148; and Diderot, 149-162; others of lesser note—D'Alembert, 163-167; Lord Stormont, the English Ambassador, 168; Comte de Creutz, the Swedish Ambassador, 168; the Marquis Caraccioli, the Neapolitan Ambassador, 169; the Abbé Galliani, 169-177; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 178; M. Dorat, 183; ladies—Mme. de Vermenoux, 191; Mme. Geoffrin, 197; the Maréchale de Luxembourg, 206-211; the Duchesse de Lauzun, 212-220; M. Watelet and Mme. Lecomte, 232-234; Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault, 235-241; Mme. de Marchais, 245-253; the Comtesse d'Houdetot, 254-266; Bouffon, 279-306; M. Thomas, 307-328; her *salon* in the Rue Bergère, and its frequenters, ii. 148

Salons, Diderot's, i. 155, 156

Samois, i. 256, 257, 261

Saurin, Mme., notice of, i. 251 and *n*

Saussure, Mme. Necker de, notice of, ii. 17 and *n*

Sayons, M., and his *Histoire du XVIII^e Siècle à l'Étranger*, i. 14 *n*

Scudéry's, Mlle. de, romances, i. 27

Sedaine, Michel Jean, notice of, i. 182 *n*

Simiane, Mme. de, notice of, ii. 239

Sisters of Charity first employed by Mme. Necker, ii. 135 *n*

Socialisme contemporain, Les Origines du, M. Janet's, ii. 101

Société du Printemps, the, i. 35

Sommariva, M., notice of, i. 255 *n*

Sophie, the, of Rousseau's *Confessions*, notice of, i. 254 and *n*

Sorbonne, the, i. 294

Souvenirs et Portraits, i. 209 *n*

Souvenirs, the Baron de Gleichen's, ii. 69

Souvenirs d'un Officier des Gardes-Francaises, ii. 189

Spartiate, an article for the *Encyclopédie*, i. 259

Staël-Holstein, the Baron de, his marriage with Germaine Necker, and provision made for him by Gustavus III. of Sweden, ii. 61-66; extract from the *Unpublished Correspondence* of the, 160; from his despatches regarding Marie Antoinette, 163; and the arrest of the Cardinal de Rohan, 163; his letter to Gustavus III. regarding M. Calonne, 171; to M. Necker announcing the loss of his position as ambassador, 226; is reinstated afterwards, 226 *n*

Staël-Holstein, the Baron Auguste de, his edition of the collected works of his grandfather, M. Necker, ii. 73 and *n*; gives a list of offices suppressed by his grandfather, 104 *n*

Staël, Mme. de, her apology for her father in her *Considerations sur la Révolution Française*, ii. 73; extract from her journal regarding her father's work on *L'Importance des Opinions Religieuses*, 153; another regarding her feelings for him, 155; becomes the central figure in her mother's drawing-room, 159; her presentation at court and kind reception by the queen, 164; who gives her kind advice, 166; her indignation on hearing of her father's exile, 168; her letter to her husband on the subject, 170; her explanation of her father's policy during his second term of office, 180; her letter to the Baron de Jessé to obtain her father's release, 196; she joins him at Coppet, 196; her husband dismissed from his position as ambassador, 226; she is invited to reside with her father, but refuses to leave Paris, 227; her plan for the escape of the royal family, 228; is at last compelled to leave Paris for Coppet, 229; her dislike for Switzerland, 230; letter to her husband, 231; her scheme for the escape of her friends from France, 232; her endeavours to save the Princesse de Poix, 237; her defence of the

Queen, 248; extract from her *Reflexions sur le Procès de la Reine*, 248; her remarks on the death of Gibbon, 251; on the fall of Robespierre, 252; letter to the Princesse d'Hénin, 253
Staël, Mme. de, induces her father to write a little tale, i. 96 *n*
Staël, the Baroness Auguste de, *née* Vernet, i. 6 *n*
Stanhope's, Lord, *Life of William Pitt*, ii. 48 *n*
Steimlen, M., i. 88
Stormont, Lord, the English ambassador to France, i. 168; Mme. Necker's letter to, on the death of Mme. du Deffand, 231
Suard, Jean Baptiste Antoine, notice of, i. 115 *n*; his translations, 176 and *n*
Suard, Mme., notice of, i. 188 *n*
Sudermanie, the Duc de, afterwards Charles XIII., ii. 226 *n*
Swan, story of the, i. 305 and *n*
Système de la Nature, Le, i. 137

T

Taboureau, M., Controller-General, i. 237; Mme. de la Ferte-Imbault's letter to Mme. Necker regarding, 238; ii. 94, 95
Target, M., notice of, i. 181, *n*; ii. 115
Terray, the Abbé, notice of, ii. 101 *n*
Thermidor, the 9th of, Mme. de Staël's joy at, ii. 252
Thomas, M., his poem *La Pétréide*, i. 249 *n*; extract from his *Essai sur les Femmes*, 267; Mme. Necker's feelings towards, 268; notice of him, and of his intercourse and correspondence with Mme. Necker, 307-328; his mother and his early upbringing; 3 9; his melancholy and fits of enthusiasm, 311; his letters to Mme. Necker, 313-325; his death, 325
Toulouse, the Archbishop of, notice of, ii. 130 *n*
Tower, the old, of Coppet Castle, i. 3; reflections of the author while engaged in, 5, 6
Traité de l'Éducation progressive, Mme. Necker de Saussure's, ii. 17 *n*
Traité sur l'Administration des Finances, M. Necker's, ii. 149
Tressan, the Comte de, his letter to M. Necker, ii. 111 and *n*
Tronchin, Théodore, French physician, notice of, i. 80, 87, 135
Trudaine, M. de, notice of, 90 and *n*
Turgot, M., i. 129; Louis XVI.'s eulogium on, ii. 101

U

Unpublished Correspondence of the Baron de Staël-Holstein, extract from the, ii. 160

V

Vaud, the canton of, i. 8, 9 *n*; natural qualities and educational acquirements of the women of, 12; picture of pastoral life in, 16-20; its condition in the sixteenth century, ii. 198; peculiarities in the laws of, 204
Vaudreuil, M. de, notice of, ii. 164
Vergennes, M. de, notice of, ii. 95 and *n*, 164 *n*
Vermenoux, Mme. de, befriends Mme. Necker and takes her to Paris, i. 87, 88; her estrangement from Mme. Necker, 99; their reconciliation and after intercourse, 191-196; Marmontel's reference to her in his *Mémoires*, 192; story of her connection with Jacob Meister, and of the bequeathal of her heart, 195; becomes godmother to Germaine Necker, ii. 21; her letter to Mme. Necker regarding the child, 23
Vernei, Mme. la Marquise de, i. 59
Vernet Family, notice of the, ii. 19 and *n*
Vernet, Jacob, notice of ii. 20 and *n*
Verses to Mademoiselle S——, by Gibbon, i. 45
Veuve du Malabar, Lemière's, i. 194

Vie de la Marquise de Montagu, i. 234
Voisenon, the Abbé, notice of, i. 185 *n*
Voland, Sophie, notice of, i. 149 and *n*
Voltaire, his life in Lausanne, and his opinion of the place and the people, i. 20 *et seq.*; his correspondence with Mme. Necker, 222; his verses on the Duc de Choiseul's attempt to make Versoix a commercial port, ii. 76 and *n*
Voyage à l'Ile de France, i. 178

W

WALPOLE, HORACE, notice of, i. 224 and *n*; extracts from letters addressed to him by Mme. du Deffand, 224, 227, 228, 229, 231
Watelet, M., his *liaison* with Mme. Lecomte, and his intercourse with Mme. Necker, i. 232 and *n*, 233
Weber's, Joseph, *Memoirs*, ii. 70
Women of bygone times, an eulogy on the, i. 265; friendship among women, 267

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